クロックワークプラネット
III
著
榎宮祐・暇奈椿
協著
illustration
茨乃
講談社ラノベ文庫

Clockwork Planet - Volume 03

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III
クロックワーク・プラネット
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それは全ての出来事をたった一つの名前に収束・集結させた――最後の事件。
そしてこれから世界を震撼させる数多の事件の根源となった――最初の事件。
後の歴史に「二・八事変」または「セカンド・インシデント」と記される出来事は。
この年、この日、この時刻、この瞬間。
輪暦二〇二六年二月二〇日、日本標準時間、午前五時五九分――

突如パズルのように斬り刻まれ崩落するビルに、人々の視線が集中する。
崩落音が轟く中、だが透き通るような自鳴琴（オルゴール）の音色で言葉が響く。
「――アテンション・プリーズ♪」
崩落するビルを前に、黒い礼装（ドレス）姿の少女が優雅に一礼。
その仕草を拙く真似て、甲冑を纏う紅白の幼女も一礼。
「ごきげんよう、わたくし、銘（な）をInitial-Y壱番機【付き従うもの（アメレイデ）】リューズと申します」
「え、えと……Initial-Y肆番（よん）機【撃滅するもの（トリーシュラ）】アングル……です。は、はじめまして」
――二つの自動人形（伝説）の挨拶を以て、始まった。

そして。
静止した世界で、燃え尽きるようにその姿を変えた美しい女（アングル）は。
全てのInitial-Yシリーズの中で、自分にだけ許された二つ目の終句を告げた。

それは自らに終焉を告げる訃音の調べだった。
永久運動機関（パーペチュアルギア）――永遠を証明する機構が破綻し、なお駆動する音。
永遠の少女という空想が崩れ、現実が自らを否定して目を覆ってしまう。
だがそれは、終焉と引き替えにたった二つの理を証明する。
即ち「撃滅するもの（トリーシュラ）」――三千世界に撃ち滅ぼせぬものなしという不条理を。

『――『終焉機動（ステイルメイト）』――』

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Prologue – 06:05 – Reviver

In conclusion.

—The universe had gone rampant right from the beginning.

Before we could stand by ourselves on this world, we were wailing when we were born into this world.

We kept screaming, hollering, I'm right here, fearing the surrounding unknown and threats, dragging our weak bodies as we struggled, racking our brains as we wondered how to survive.

Where did we come from—

—And where will we go?

During this process, we created God out of our fear and cowardice, crafted philosophy as a means to obtain distilled rationality, and discovered mathematics as tools for deductions.

Tentatively, little by little, we created our own history.

…During this process, the world ended several times.

What was once a flat land became a sphere. Us, who were once the center of the universe, now revolve around the sun. Humans discovered the law of universal gravitation, learned how to fly in space, came up with the 5 forces that form the world, and finally, relied on logic, deduction, and the throne of the divine truth.

We used wisdom, languages and violence, shed tears of blood, repeatedly indulged in delight, fury, sadness, and the countless numbers of annoyance, pain, and trauma—

Again and again, we rebuilt our world.

Again and again, we rewrote our history.

Again and again, we extended our lifespans.

However, everything ended in futility.

On that day, that time, that instance, it all vanished in a fleeting bubble.

On the day the Earth was destroyed, the world ended, and the universe ended up that way.

And—when humanity realized the truth.

Our footprints were all wasted. The meandering process of pain and suffering was merely a foolish misunderstanding. The understanding we worked so hard to accumulate was merely a worthless speckle.

Humanity, on the cusp of obtaining the truth, was sent back to the primal age.

This universe was merely a toy box to God.

And it was proven that we are merely ignorant babies.

However—we still had to feel doubt.

If this world, filled with all sorts of ambiguity, uncertainty, irrationality, and paradoxes, was just for God's amusement.

Does this world, which we live on, really exist?

And so, 1000 years later…

●

In the sky above Grid Akihabara.

20 airplanes glided past the sky.

The turbines rumbled the atmosphere, the fighter jets out letting out shrill sonic booms from their springs, and they were practically steel Pretodacyls.

They were the 7th squadron affiliated to the Tokyo ‘military’, piloting the 7th generation of fighter jets.

—Commonly known as the Sakeshitsu Team.

The strongest aerial fighting corps the Multiple Grid Tokyo ‘Military’ had.

These 20 fighter jets took off from Grid Yokohama, and were headed for Akihabara.

They had only one mission objective,

“—Destroy the unknown massive weapon that appeared in Grid Akihabara.”

“Eat shit and die.”

Inside the machine that was flying through the sky at supersonic speed.

Leading his squadron was Flight Lieutenant Sakeshitsu, and he muttered upon hearing the order that came from the transmission.

He was suddenly woken up in the wee hours, and was ordered to be on standby for combat. He finally got the permission to launch when dawn broke—only to find that it was some unknown massive weapon.”

“AWACS. If you’re so sleepy, how about I spank your ass with a few Attackers?”

This man was infamous for being impatient.

He gave his threat through the communicator in a half-joking manner, only to be met with a curt reply,

“Do watch your language, Lieutenant, this is an official order.”

“Shit’s supposed to come out from the ass.”

“To repeat myself, Lieutenant, this is an official order. The 7th squadron is to quickly destroy the massive unknown weapon that appeared in Grid Akihabara, codenamed ‘Earth Spider’ for now.”

Haa— Flight Lieutenant Sakeshitsu snorted, and guffawed.

“Are you an idiot? No, you definitely are one. You’re actually thinking of me as one.”

“Lieutenant.”

“Hey, idiot, you hear me? I don’t know what that Earth Spider is, but that monster suddenly appeared in the middle of Tokyo? Did the capital guards wank enough to fall asleep or something?”

“The capital guards were all wiped out.”

Upon hearing the AWACS answer, Lieutenant Sakeshitsu went silent.

Following that, visual data from the communicator was sent to all the pilots.

The images that appeared in the sight—included a mechanical spider massive enough to trample buildings, and flames spewing everywhere in the middle of Akihabara. This caused all the pilots to groan.

“All pilots, be warned. As you can see, this threat is real. If Grid Akihabara is destroyed, it can be said that Tokyo—or even Japan itself, will be destroyed. All hands to battle stations!”

“…”

“Also, Lieutenant Sakeshitsu, you are to appear in court once the operation is over. Are you looking forward to it?”

“—Well yeah, I’m looking forward to it.”

If they could return alive, that is.

The snide remark was about to sprout out of the throat, and Lieutenant Sakeshitsu barely managed to swallow it down.

As the squadron leader, he could not be saying this when his subordinates could hear him through the reverberation communicator.

Feeling extremely vexed, Lieutenant Sakeshitsu slammed his fiist onto the canopy.

An unknown massive weapon suddenly appeared in the middle of the capital? Surely it was something to laugh about.

Such a massive thing actually existed in the underground without anyone knowing? If he was to really think such words were convincing, he should have first blown up his head that was full of shit.

They already knew—or at the very least, the ‘higher ups’. However, what was their reason?

If not, why was it that they gave the unknown enemy a ‘codename’, rather than call it ‘target’, and explain the objective…!

—It’s obvious The Lieutenant gritted his teeth, almost gnashing them to bits.

The capital squadron assaulted it when Grid Akihabara was attacked.

—And they failed. Was it part of the plan? Or did something go wrong? Either way…

(Either way, we’re just cleaning up the shit from a shitting bastard here…!)

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu quietly yelled.

It was just an intuition—yet an analysis that couldn’t be any closer to the truth.

The capital guards were not weak soldiers, and they were not forces that were easily expendable.

A lot of the budget and highly intensive training was splurged upon them to protect Tokyo, and they were the strongest fighting force amongst the country ‘military’.

Now, this battalion was wiped out—as shown on the visual beforehand. There was nary a scratch on the enemy.

(So those damned politicians got terrified and left the dirty work to the air force.)

—Way too ridiculous.

If that side fails, come to us—that trail of thought was not only shallow, if anyone was to really think the situation could be dealt with as it was, they would be hopeless idiots.

The capital guards had many weapons with Resonance Cannons mounted upon them.

The anti-land weapons, in theory the strongest, could not deal a single dent on it.

This showed that the enemy had defensive capabilities far beyond that, or some sort of nullifier mechanism.

They could not tell what that was, but there was something they could conclude.

That even if they were to expend all the Attacker guided missiles on this jet, the chances of an effective assault was basically—

“We’re reaching our target. All hands, prepare for combat!”

“…Understood.”

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu answered the AWACS, and let out a sigh.

—Let’s just follow orders. It’s a soldier’s responsibility. But—

The **higher-ups** announced that the enemy had an unknown number of weapons, cannons, and the range was unknown. In that case—he quickly sneered.

He grabbed the microphone at his mouth, and informed all his forces.

“Storm One to all units. Formation Delta—’Burst and Run’.”

This formation was used for the worst possible scenario, to avoid all units from being caught in the enemy’s range.

—To charge in from the maximum range possible, fire all the weapons, and run—in response to that order, the AWACS yelled.

“Lieutenant!? You are not given that order for such an operation!! Acting on your own is—.”

“—Operation? If ‘Shooting down this mysterious Earth Spider’ is called an **operation**, I’ll just give orders as to how we’re going to do it! If you want to see a show, at least shut that damn mouth up!!”

He would at least follow the orders. That was his responsibility as a soldier. However—

He had a duty beyond that—to avoid any senseless waste of life by avoiding useless battles of attrition.

“You hear me? All units, obey my command. I shall bear responsibility.”

“Lieutenant!”

The AWACS yelled, but the subordinates ignored that, answering,

“Storm Two here, understood. All units, Formation Delta.”

With this command given, “understood” all the units answered, and proceeded to get into position.

“7th squadron…! All of you…!”

An agitated yell could be heard from the AWACS unit, but suddenly—

The signal was cut off.

At the same time, an explosion came from the AWACS flying above their heads.

“Wh-what’s going on here!? Are you—”

“Y-you got to be kidding…they blew up the AWACS!?”

Before more of them could be rattled, at a place far to the front of Lieutenant Sakeshitsu—

The Sonar caught a major reaction, and he clicked his tongue, growling,

“All hands, evasive maneuvers and scatter, and escape at the maximum speed possible using your after burners—**we’re in the enemy’s range**!!”

“U-understood—”

The units could not hear their anxiety as they followed their leader’s instruction, turning back greatly.

However, even Lieutenant Sakeshitsu himself was left rattled.

(They blew up the AWACS first—? Those shitty bastards…)

—The enemy shot down the AWACS that was 20,000m above the planes, beyond the range of the Attackers.

The intent was obvious.

It was meant to be a clear taunt to all units entering the range…

The lieutenant withstood the tremendous G-force, and flew back with the other units, and the winds caused by the turbines—were ignited.

“!!”

The impact caused by the maximum speed, Mach 5 burst, created a massive pressure that practically crushed his consciousness with the pilot. And while he gritted his teeth, right in front of him was—

A unit that completed its turn and ignited its afterburners. It got blown up.

Having witnessed this, the elites of the 7th squadron widened their eyes.

“Storm 3 was shot down! I repeat! Storm 3 was shot down!”

“Wh-what happened!? What shot it—”

Screams of agony rang through the communicator—and they were cut off. Flashes appeared in front of them.

The squadron evaded and retreated at maximum speed, only to be shot down, and Sakeshitsu gnashed his teeth, yelling,

—How the hell do I know, damn it!

The attack came from beyond the maximum range of the Attacker missiles—beyond 18,000m—

It managed to accurately shoot down the AWACS that’s 20,000m above us? And flying objects maneuvering at hyper sonic? Such a ridiculous Aerial Defense System—No, it was still **impossible** for a weapon with multiple functions.

The reality remained however that Sakeshitsu’s units were being shot down one by one.

They could not dodge, let alone shoot back, and were being plummeted—and then…

He had a ridiculous instinct.

“—Damn it!”

Sakeshitsu followed his gut instinct without hesitation, forcefully removed the limit at the front of the plane, and pushed the control stick forward.

The nose of the plane sank, and it sank **straight downwards**.

He did this while removing the limiter. Normally, this was not something to be done—it was a forbidden maneuver.

The tremendous stress from the 'Minus G' caused the blood to gather in the head, and his vision was dyed red for an instance.

—That was a phenomenon known as 'Red out', one that would normally kill a pilot. However—

"—…!!!"

A tremendous impact grazed past the top of his unit immediately afterwards, proving that the ridiculous instinct was correct.

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu managed to dodge 'some sort of an attack' that closed in from behind.

The moment he realized this, he adjusted the machine back to its balanced position—ignoring the shrilling agony of the intense migraine.

"You got to be kidding! I'm flying at 5 times the speed of sound! —**I can't see anything**!!"

—He was attacked in the back while flying at Mach 5.

An attack that ignored the distance caused by the Mach 5 relative velocity?

—There was no doubt. It was a 'Cannon Strike'.

The speed and precision were abnormal, unbelievable, utterly ridiculous— it was a 'magic bullet'.

"Storm One to all units! Abandoned your machines and 'bailout'—right now!!"

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu wiped into the communicator.

The cannon shot was so fast, it was unable to distinguish a maneuver approaching Mach 5—a speed of 1650m per second.

Against such a thing, all their units would be shot down before they escaped the range…

“U-understood!”

Upon affirming the responses of all the surviving forces that proceeded to bailout —

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu too pulled the lever at his feet slowly.

“…!”

His seat, along with the canopy, were ejected.

—The bailout occurred in hypersonic speed flight. While he was about to pass out from the tremendous impact above the canopy, the Lieutenant gave a heinous glare to afar.

Not at the targeted Grid Akihabara,

—But at where the National Diet Building was at—Grid Kasumigaseki.

“You shitty politicians! Just what exactly are you guys attacking…!”

Just when Lieutenant Sakeshitsu howled furiously.

—It appeared that they were all waiting for the complete annihilation of the 7th squadron.

Numerous lights glided past the sky, striking Grid Akihabara. That sight caused the Lieutenant to sneer.

—Ahh, now that the capital guards and the air force failed, we’ll now—as usual, those were shallow thoughts.

Sited at the apex of Mount Fuji was the capital defense cannon—an extremely long-ranged, mass particle fixed cannon that gave a glint.

The ‘Amano Mihashira (Heaven’s Pillar)’—the anti-air ace meant to protect the core of the Multiple Grid Tokyo.

Upon the said, Flight Lieutenant Sakeshitsu felt extremely furious, and beyond that—he sneered.

“I guess those useless politicians…already came up with what they wanted to say

next.”

While descending with the opened parachute, he was almost convinced.

—Numerous lights ripped through the sky. However, perhaps that was—

Lieutenant Sakeshitsu too pulled the lever at his feet slowly.

“…!”

His seat was ejected out of the window along with the canopy.

—It was a bailout in mid-hypersonic flight. While his consciousness was about to pass out from the intense impact from above the canopy, the Lieutenant glared heinously at a target afar.

He was not eyeing Grid Akihabara.

—But at where the National Diet Building was built on, Grid Kasumigaseki.

“You politicians!! What exactly are you attacking now…!!?”

While he was bellowing furiously,

—It appeared that they were waiting for the entire 7th squadron to be wiped out.

Countless flashes fizzled past the air, striking Grid Akihabara. This scene caused Lieutenant Sakeshitsu to laugh mockingly.

—Ahh, now that the Capital’s security teams and air forces have failed, we’ll then —that was quite a shallow way of thinking.

Those lights were from the Capital’s Defense Cannon—located at the top of Mount Fuji, a gigantic fixed artillery with massive range.

It was the anti-air trump protecting the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, the core of the Multiple Grid, Tokyo.

Such a scene left Lieutenant Sakeshitsu with something beyond hatred—a sneer.

“Those incompetent politicians…I guess they prepared their lines?”

He had a feeling of near conviction as he descended, his parachute opened.

—Numerous flashes skidded past the sky. However, it was likely that they—

…

●

—The dim, cramped space continued to tremor weakly.

It was a room with a low-ceiling, extending to the sides. The walls were plastered with numerous monitors, and the scaffolding-styled floor was littered with thick glass tubes. Blueish white flashes would appear in the tubes from time to time.

There were approximately 30 men dressed in uniform, not even a wrinkle on them.

All of them were staring at the monitors and instruments in front of them.

“Enemies lost. All units down…assessing the condition caused by the shot from the ‘Capital Defense Cannon’—”

Upon hearing a report, everyone else present gulped,

“We took 8 shots—and **0 damage**.”

Upon hearing this report, the crowd was upbeat, ready to cheer at any given moment. In the meantime,

“—Hm.”

The only one seated in the room, a sturdy old man, nodded,

“Phased Out Radar, Reader Lock, Infrared Sight, Railgun, Magnetic Shields are all stable.”

“Power at 12%. More than 2% is needed to restart the recharge rate to the expected level. Please allow for 30% power to be redirected from the Firearms Control Systems (FCS).”

“Permission granted.”

Following the brief answer to the reports, the old man—Gennai Hirayama, let out a deep sigh.

A young man standing beside him spoke up, sounding shrill and agitated.

“That really was an impressive result, my Lord. We actually managed to easily sweep that 7th squadron…!”

“This is an expected outcome.”

Gennai simply answered, reclining his upper body onto the back rest.

Yes. It was obvious, a no-brainer, an expected outcome.

—Humanity in the past used this most convenient power in the universe, one which had a hidden, infinite number of possibilities in them.

Once everything was changed to gears to create this ‘Clockwork Planet’ (this world), researching on that ‘technology’ itself was a crime.

The field of ‘electromagnetism’ dominated 3 of the 5 powers that formed the universe—electricity, magnetism, and Coulombs.

Gear weaponry were mere toys in the face of the results of electromagnetism.

—The complex electromagnetism tactical class mobile weapon, ‘Yatsukahagi’.

Looking back at its origins, it was something that was planned and built on the government’s orders.

The reason why they decided to use the name that was conceived during the development was a sarcastic jab filled with Gennai’s sad past…

“Once the other countries see our results, they will have to admit that our research has shown fruit.”

“…That might be difficult. We merely crushed a squadron.”

Gennai muttered without any emotion, and another young officer seemed agitated as he denied it,

“That’s not true! No country can ignore the fact that we destroyed Tokyo’s defense forces!”

“He’s right, my Lord. Not even the ‘Capital Defense Cannon’ can destroy us here!”

…Well, that’s true. Gennai thought.

It was obvious that the Resonance Cannon of the Capital Defense forces were ineffective.

For it could not trigger a resonance destruction phenomena upon contact with the magnetic armor.

However—the ‘Capital Defense Cannon’ was a particle cannon.

That was the final trump of Japan—used to due with the enemy in case they did attack the capital.

It was a Semi-Automatic Recoil Cannon located at Mount Fuji that could eradicate enemy armadas from exceptionally long distance.

The defense of this armor was due to the electromagnetic coupling of the metallic atoms, but based on the simulated calculations, there was a 50% chance that they could hold up against a blast from the ‘Capital Defense Cannon’—these odds themselves signified their victory.

Also, they unleashed a one-sided crushing on the highly trained air force squadron that was so renowned overseas.

“The Tokyo ‘military’ has no firepower to stand in our way now!”

“Yes…you’re right.”

Upon hearing the adjutant’s words, gennai looked around at the rowdy, amped crowd in the command room, and nodded.

—That doesn’t matter here.

In the end, it was just repaying an eye for an eye.

Their own side was the same as the government, merely repeating the acts of humanity that had carried on over eras.

Humanity could not change, and would never change.

But—Gennai wondered.

In that case, what was the entity called ‘Y’, who managed to recreate this world successfully?

This world continued to work properly, normally, precisely, yet abnormally, inconsistently, and paradoxically.

For a human who was unable to change, who exactly was he, who created this ultimate atypia called the ‘Clockwork Planet’?

He overturned all the laws humanity spent countless years and talent to accumulate like a dream, and on a certain day, suddenly threw at them a truth nobody could understand as if he was fooling around.

The one who did that was just an ordinary human—an ordinary clock technician.

It was laughable—who could actually believe such a thing? Who would accept this? He was an impertinent man who arrogantly declared that he was the truth of the Three Thousand Realms, which even the Gods in heaven would be apprehension off, that even the demons in Hell would remain silent.

Was that—’humanity’ that continued to scale up this land, despite not changing after thousands of years?

On that day

Humanity never changed. That was set in stone.

But only ‘Y’ managed to overturn all premises, and arrogantly caused the universe to break away from order.

—That cannot possibly be from human hands. If someone is able to fulfill the ‘malice’ that was so severe the word ‘evil’ could be considered tame, there was no possibility other than it coming from someone who surpassed the line of good and evil.

—However, Gennai wondered.

If that is the truth, I can accept it.

It did not matter whether he was a god or a demon. If that sort of a monster that surpassed human intellect recreated the world, and let humanity remain in an eternal delusion before their doomsday, then humanity would obviously be left powerless.

In any case, there is no reason why humanity could surpass an enlightened one,

therefore.

He was disappointed by history, despaired at the world, and right when he thought he was to die after having seen everything.

There was a boy who appeared, bringing along an automata ‘Y’ created.

Everyone was agitated, feeling invincible, their eyes burning as they set upon the next target.

Gennai’s metallic colored eyes were poised and frosty, hissing in a maniacal manner,

“Now then…come and stop if if you can, ‘Y’…”

From beyond the boundary of good and evil, you arrogantly, undauntingly created this world.

You destroyed the unchanging destiny of the ordinary humans, the destiny to self-destruct.

What else can you say in front of this truth—you monster?

What kind of existence are you, who restructured the world?

Are you an ‘enlightened’ one like gods and demons, or are you just a pompous, haughty human?

Come, prove it to me, with the world on the line…!

●

—At the same time.

In a workshop at Grid Akihabara, a blond girl—Marie, was leaning and seated against the wall, her legs spread. Her green eyes lost their usual luster as she simply remained there, thinking.

This current situation was something akin to a delusion anyone would have had.

The scene from a B thriller movie, where the world was on the brink of destruction due to some reason.

No food, no water, civilization was destroyed, and all she could rely on was her knowledge, her body, and her allies.

…I see, she thought.

It was to be expected why they were called B movies—they did not seem realistic at all.

There was no scriptwriter who actually experienced the world destroyed…and thus, they did not understand reality.

In reality, it was not that simple.

In reality, it was ridiculously **far beyond** human imagination.

Marie chuckled lifelessly as she saw Halter lying prone with smoke rising from his body—remaining silent. She weakly held onto a screwdriver, and the other screwdriver was firmly stuck to it, seemingly pasted to it as it dangle down.

Destruction of civilization? Only able to rely on her own knowledge, physical body and allies?

You got to be kidding—this is reality. An inexplicable, violent, the worst possible calamity of a reality.

Marie could not help but let out a heartfelt sigh, and at that moment,

“—woah—that’s hot—!?”

A petite boy squealed as he jumped up.

“It’s hot!!? —What’s going on—and why is it noisy inside my earphones?”

The boy, Naoto Miura, had woken up, and was making a ruckus as he frantically tossed aside his earphones. Then, he found Marie staring at him blankly.

“Hey…did something…happen…?”

It seemed he was in intense pain; his breathing was frenetic, his expression contorted as he asked an obvious question.

—Now that's a good question. Marie smiled.

"It's my guess…I can tell you this, maybe. We go hit with as 'electromagnetic pulse'."

Marie's reply was a little lifeless. Naoto in turn frowned skeptically.

"An elec—what?"

…Marie could not longer feel anger at this point.

With a hoarse sigh, she raised the screwdriver in her hand, and raised it to Naoto's face.

"—**Everything and anything was destroyed**…can you understand that now?"

The abnormally radical and powerful electromagnetic pulse **caused everything else to be magnetized**.

No—if that was the case, it would have been fine. Marie thought.

It was likely that due to the electromagnetic induction, the particle gears, wires, springs, and all kinds of intricate parts were melted. What was left behind were simply dumb tools that could not be used because they were magnetized.

They were merely clockwork instruments that could not function at all.

Calculators? Cars? The lights and lock off this room, even the screwdriver were **wrecked**.

"Do I need to make it easier for you to understand?"

Marie opened her hand.

The screwdriver fell to the floor, giving off a dry sound.

"Everything is magnetized now, and we don't have a way to get out of this room."

—It had been pointed out since ancient times that the machinery made from gear

technology could not resist against magnetism.

And thus, humanity—had no choice but to give up on electromagnetism.

However, though the 'planet governor' located at the Poles did obstruct the electromagnetic waves coming from space, they could not completely negate the influence of electromagnetism on this planet. Thus, the technology to counter magnetism—how to prevent the gear machinery from magnetism, was always a topic of research.

One could completely understand after seeing this situation.

To summarize—for Marie, no, for all the ordinary humans living on this planet.

—All the relevant knowledge and technology was completely sealed.

With the clock gear of the 'Clockwork Planet' destoryed, not even a single tool could be used, let alone for repairs.

That was akin to a bird who could not fly even with wings—no, that example might be more fortunate.

For even a bird with its wings snapped still had feet.

…But no matter how much Marie was hailed as a genius, she needed the basic knowledge required to take action.

And with this planet refitted entirely with gears, the current situation was—

…This was 'reality', the worst calamity.

What should they do—this was not a hopeful situation where they could say this.

They were even robbed of the thought of what could they do.

Marie suddenly recalled. She once watched an utterly ridiculous, foolish movie of the old ages, far beyond the absurdness of this B thriller movie scenario.

Her lips showed a parched smile.

In that story, the world the protatgonist lived in was actually just an illusion.

The world was long destoryed, and humans were connected to a machines, living

in a dream world they created. Of course, she knew that such a story was utterly foolish—but if she was to think of it as the truth.

The current situation was, yes, realism was starting to kick in.

Now then, what could she do?

All she had was a brain that could only daydream.

In this world where she was utterly helpless, where everything was a dream.

Should she think of a way to escape the dream, even though she only had a head?

Everything she was seeing was just a dream after all, right?

And such a hallucination was—or rather, if it was really a hallucination, 'that' would be a happy despair. She looked around through the thick windows, and the place where she caught sight of was the thing triggering this nightmare.

There was a gigantic mobile weapon, standing tall there, blotting the sun.

That monster easily crushed everything and anything, clearly existing there as the sign of despair.

"—Hey—R-RyuZU!?"

Naoto's cry echoed in the room, and Marie turned around to look.

Entering her eyes was the sight of the fallen silver haired girl.

A frantic Naoto hurriedly leapt over, wanting to carry her beloved girl—

"—It's hot—!!?"

The moment he touched her, no, he was really screaming right when he was about to touch her, and he retreated.

And then, he finally realized the reason why he woke up from the heat.

His face paled, blood practically drained from his face.

—RyuZu was lying in a pool of blood.

What caused this impression was the metallic panels on the floor, heated so much that they were somewhat melted.

And the reason that occurred was because of RyuZU.

Her body, now collapsed and unable to move, was giving off enough heat to melt metal.

Naoto looked to be utterly overwhelmed by fright, and with a trembling voice, he yelled,

“Hey, what about AnchoR? Old man Halter! That uncle head (Vermouth)—”

Upon being asked that, Marie wordlessly averted her eyes.

Lying over there was Halter, giving off fumes.

And right beside him was AnchoR, like a puppet with her strings severed, or as one would say, a statue as she laid down there silently. She did not move at all, and it appeared that she—was dead.

And then, Marie stared at Vermouth, whose was left with a head that rolled to her feet, the eyes looking completely blank, and chuckled,

“Didn’t you hear what I just said?”

She began to talk with the tone of one narrating a nightmare,

“Everything is destroyed…”

…

The silence was like a deep sea.

“—Don’t kid around with me…”

Naoto gnashed his teeth so hard them were creaking, and lifted Marie while the latter was leaning weakly against the wall.

“Then we got to hurry up and fix this thing—you can fix right, right!?”

Marie let Naoto shake her around without putting up and fight, and coldly snickered,

“Yeah, I can…just get rid of the magnetism—if we can get rid of it, that is.”

“Then what are you spacing out for!? Hurry—”

“How?”

After hearing Marie’s calm voice, Naoto was left flabbergasted.

With hollow eyes, Marie stared at the eyes that were staring right back at her, continuing,

“It’s really great to be ignorant, isn’t it, Mr Naoto? I’m really envious.”

Get rid of the magnetism? Of course she knew how to.

She could magnetize a clockwork installation, and looking at it the other way, of course she could remove it.

As an ex-Meister, Marie could do the easy job of adjusting a magnetized clockwork installation with her eyes closed. The theory was simple; add a similar level of magnetism or electric current, and reverse the magnetic field; the magnetism would be removed, gone.

That was all. Marie knew very well the necessary methods, skills and order.

However, the important thing—

“**Electricity is a must here!** Do you understand? That shitty weapon just released a real taboo amongst all forbidden stuff in the international treaties! That shitty electromagnetic power is forbidden in the regulations…!”

After hearing Marie’s lament—no, her lamenting cry, Naoto was overwhelmed, and let go.

Marie again leaned at the wall, pondering,

—Yeah, of course.

No country or organization would actually abid by this clause.

Halter and that Vermouth had the illegal electromagnetic devices installed in their cyborg bodies..

And to put it, just in case—though it might be impossible on this planet—certain parts themselves were already invariably emitting electromagnetic fields, so a part of the 'Meister Guild' and the military had some legal electromagnetism dispelling devices that were permitted by the International Supervision System(ISS). Marie herself had such an experience before.

However—

"Those amazing ears of yours are able to hear, right!? That electromagnetic pulse **destroyed everything** in Grid Akihabara! So? How am I supposed to get out of this room!? Where do I get the devices to remove the magnetic fields? Can you explain that to me in a few simple words…!?"

Marie lashed out—and tears were in her eyes as she got to the latter half.

—It was impossible.

Marie knew very well the method to generate electricity from gears.

But that method could not possibly generate an electric current that could be controlled precisely for magnetism removal.

Researching on such knowledge itself was a crime, let alone knowing it.

And also, a legal magnetic remover required a strict set of controls akin to that of a level 4 contagion.

It would be difficult for Marie, no different from an ordinary civilian at this point, to obtain one at this point.

Furthermore, there was no such magnetic remover as large as a humanoid robot anywhere in the world, let alone this city grid.

If one were to take a long retreat say—even if they could intrude into a control facility and steal a magnetic remover, they could only remove it from a few delicate parts.

The protection on Halter's head might still be working at this point…but there was still insufficient time.

At this point, it was already—

"…We can't get out of this room in the…first place…"

Marie muttered, and looked down.

—But that move alone,

Was that enough to render her so helpless?

Because of one single move, all the knowledge she accumulated to this point, expertise she etched within her body—

That was really…like an illusion—just when she shed a tear, at that moment—

—Suddenly, a crack could be heard from that thick glass.

Marie lifted her head in shock, and found Naoto smashing the window with a chair.

Twice, thrice,four times—the crack on the hardened glass began to expand after multiple hits.

“R-argh!”

And after an umpteenth hit, the window finally broke.

It seemed that as Naoto was too forceful, the chair slipped from Naoto’s hands, and flew out of the window.

“Okay. RyuZU, AnchoR, old man Halter…I guess we can just hold that head in our hands. We can throw them all down one after another…the 8th floor? Well, we’ll just get a long cable or cloth to get to the ground.”

“…”

While Marie continued to remain still, Naoto clicked his tongue,

“—Argh, enough already! Get over there, you’re so slow you’re in the way!”

After saying that, Naoto again moved over to RyuZU.

Without hesitation, he reached his hand out to the body that was so hot, it could melt the floor.

“Wa-wait a sec!”

Naoto ignored Marie, who was trying to stop him, and grabbed RyuZU’s body.

“—(sizzles)”

Naoto’s face suddenly winced, and the smell of burnt human flesh reached Marie’s nose.

But Naoto naturally lifted RyuZU, appearing not to be in ay pain.

Marie shrieked at him,

“Do you know what you’re doing!?”

“Shut up! If you’re not going to be helpful, then just stay in a corner and shut up!”

Naoto dragged RyuZU along the scorching floor, and yelled,

“**I don’t know what I’m doing at all!** But I know that I can’t let RyuZU remain like this!”

The moment he yelled this, he put RyuZU back down onto the cooled floor.

The sight of her lying face up, to put it lightly, was that she was hideous.

The parts, starting from the abdomen, were starting to melt—even her skeletal frame seemed to be transforming, probably due to being in excessive heat over a long time.

If it were an ordinary automata, surely such severe damage would have warranted her to be scraped.

Even Marie could not patch up this level of damage immediately.

It was not merely an issue of tools; there were too many pricy parts to be replaced.

But at the same time—Marie sensed that something was amiss.

Was this ‘merely the level of damage’ caused by a high temperature that could melt metal.

She thought about the parts in the abdomen; they probably were at several thousand degrees Celsius heat at some point.

But despite the effects of that heat, there was no damage to be seen on the clothing, the artificial skin, or the hair, nothing other than the abdomen.

No. Marie already had a doubt.

Was **the heat that melted the parts** due to the electrical resistance?

“—!”

However, upon seeing RyuZU in such a state, Naoto shook his head hard, and suddenly got up.

He did not care about the burnt skin and melted adhesive sticking onto his clothes as he proceeded into the workshop to look for wires, cables or something that appeared sturdy, and tied them all together.

Marie watched his back, and stammered,

“…What…are you doing…”

“Can’t you tell? Oh great genius!? If you can’t open the door, get out from the window!”

As Marie had said, this was a workshop, a sealed environment where not even a speck of dust could get in. The automatic door that was locked by machinery was damaged, and they could not open it—now then, what could they do?

—Just break through the window used for lighting and get out.

That was simple enough. However…

“—Once you get out, what are you going to do…?”

The moment Marie asked this question, Naoto turned his head around in frustration.

Those eyes were clearly—giving a condescending glint, and he yelled at her without hesitating.

“Get out of here! Try and find a way to get to that bellend! RyuZU, AnchoR, and get old man Halter and Vermouth along!? And fix that guy up!”

Then, Naoto’s face was suddenly contorted.

That was the most heinous glare Marie had yet to see before.

He glared outside the window while a vengeful glint, of which a killing intent would be putting lightly.

—That was the culprit behind everything.

He glared at the massive weapons stomping through the streets of Akihabara, saying,

“I’m going to boil those guys who got my wife and daughter involved alive, you hear me!?”

—

“If you aren’t going to help, then just stop getting in my way and just shut up!”

—This guy really doesn’t understand the situation after all? Marie wondered, but at the same time, she understood.

If they could not get out through the door—they could slip out from the window —truly, she had fallen on hard times, to be unable to think of things even an idiot could think of.

“…I told you already, right? The magnetic fields in Grid Akihabara basically means that everything ‘stopped’…even our normal means of getting to the next Grid are limited. Don’t know…?”

“It’s much better than just stupidly staying around here!”

“Yeaaahhh…—I guess that’s really the case!”

Yes, she had to admit this.

Naoto, who had been taking action without thinking, was correct as compared to her.

After hearing this unexpected answer, Naoto was momentarily stunned.

At the same time, Marie patted her face, and stood up, meeting Naoto in the eyes.

As usual—no, the grey eyes gave off a brighter glint than usual in the dim light .

She had the eyes of one who was not defeated despite this situation.

At this point—**she would let those eyes guide her**.

“First, we need to make sure to get to the arranged place with Teacher Conrad and the others—Grid Ueno. Normally it’s not easily to get over there when the one of the areas in the Multiple Grids stops functioning—but nobody’s around in Grid Akihabara, so we probably can use the forbidden bridge…”

Marie continued on, and suddenly felt something strange.

Once she saw Naoto lower his eyebrows, looking relieved as he beamed, she felt her heart skip a beat.

At this moment.

“—Magnetic field confirmed to have vanished. Emergency Sequence Ended. Booting normal sequence.”

Upon hearing that soft voice, Naoto and Marie immediately turned their heads over.

Right where they were looking at was—

“…That shocked me.”

AnchoR blinked her round eyes, widened them, and tilted her head in confusion.

We’re the shocked ones here, okay? Marie thought. Faster than her was—

“WAAAAHHHHH!!!! ANCHOORRR’S FINNNNNNNEEEEEEEEEE YOU NEARLY SCARED ME THERE DAMMIT!!!”

Naoto, who was right beside her, immediately leapt right at AnchoR, screaming excitedly,

“—!? I don’t want papa to die!”

And while AnchoR innocently believed Naoto’s words as she embraced him firmly, Naoto continued,

“Okay, don’t worry, I won’t die! RyuZU’s not too bad, or else I really would have passed out.”

“…Is it AnchoR’s fault? …Is AnchoR, a bad girl?”

“Not at all, you’re really a good girl! It’s thanks to you that papa here didn’t die! **Papa might think of dying right away if you aren’t moving at all, AnchoR**!”

“…? Papa nearly died because of AnchoR, but thanks to AnchoR…?”

After hearing that conversation between the idiot and the automata, Maria could not say anything.

—How did it end up like this?

She actually managed to withstand a electromagnetic pulse?

That was a magnetic field that utterly burned through Halter's defenses!? And the latter had the next generation military cyborg body developed by the Breguets.

This is not the moment to be surprised by them, right? N-no—if that was not it, why is it that they stopped until just a while ago? No no no! More importantly, what did that idiot just say?"

"—Naoto, did you just say…that AnchoR was moving…"

"Eh, ah, she was up and running the entire time. That's why I gave up on killing myself."

Naoto stated this as if it was a matter of fact.

"Since AnchoR was moving, I thought RyuZU would be heated up due to something, but I didn't have any proof, so I thought I had to hurry and do something, even if it's a second earlier. And then you were hesitating so much, Marie…"

Marie ignored Naoto's voice as he grumbled and caressed AnchoR, thinking,

—The reason—why she got hot…?

And for an instance, right before Marie was about to think about something, AnchoR said apologetically,

"…So-rry…the 'anti buzz' function…erm…"

She explained, not understanding her own functions—or rather, she appeared not to understand herself at all."

"…I entered an **'emergency'** heat sequence…"

—

Marie did her best to hold herself from passing out.

—Ahh,that was true—there was another way to get rid of the magnetism.

She would admit it, that she had forgotten all about it. Her mind was in turmoil after all.

—But at least let me explain myself somehow, Marie begged to no one.

Because this method typically ‘could not be done ‘, and would ‘hardly be done’.

And furthermore, it was an automatic action. However, with the unknown actually explaining this, Marie exclaimed,

“**Heating to remove magnetism**? That can only occur at Curie point! Are you kidding me? How do you do that?”

—This was a phenomena called Curie Point,

Where anything with magnetism will lose it once it was heated at a certain temperature.

To put it simply, the magnetism could be removed through heating. It was really an overly simple method.

But such a method would be called a final course of action—

—No, it was such a violent course of action, it would not even be ‘considered’ as a final solution.

Why? Because once it was heated, the objects would naturally expand or melt. Every part was made of different materials, and so the temperatures required to cool them down was different. This would cause any intricate machinery to be ruined in the process of heating.

However, there were automatas that could automatically heat themselves up?

The gears would lose firmness under the heat, and the cables would self-destruct —surely, it would be strange if that was not the case. To look at it another way, even if it was possible, the mechanics would have stopped the moment they were magnetized.

In any case, how was the heating function **able to continue working**—!?

While Marie continued to ponder alone, Naoto ignored her as he muttered,

In other words, heating can remove the magnetism, right? AnchoR has a ‘perpetual gear’ with zero friction, and can continue running to slowly increase heat. RyuZU herself **converted all her energy into heat, and stopped**, right?”

After hearing this, AnchoR suddenly stood up, and exclaimed,

“S-sister…! No, she can’t cool down by herself…”

“It’s fine, AnchoR~no matter what happens~don’t worry. RyuZU’s moved to an icy floor!”

“…Papa’s amazing…!”

AnchoR widened her eyes as she marvelled.

However, she turned to look at the burns on the hands, and her eyes lowered sadly.

“…But, you’re hurt. Doesn’t it hurt…?”

“Ahahaha! This isn’t much for my wife and daughter!”

Naoto said with a straight face, basically like a father acting tough in front of his daughter.

Yeah—this really is amazing, Marie was frustrated.

So amazing that it was beyond her comparison, and one could say that it was beyond what was common sense.

—The situation was beyond her understanding.

But after looking at such a scene, Marie merely matter,

“Yeah yeah. The heat dispelled the magnetic fields.”

She could not accept this.

She could not understand.

But Naoto merely ignored her dumbfounded self as he moved forward, and for some reason—

Marie felt a hollow, dry feeling rising in her, and she grabbed Vermouth’s head that was left on the floor.

In any case, she had to do what she could do.

“Anyway, first, we need to get out of Grid Akihabara.”

Saying that, she picked up the head,

And casually tossed it at the scorching floor.

●

“You rotten bitch! You nearly boiled my head off!? Has your head loosened as much as your ass did!?”

While they were moving through the completely silent Akihabara, Vermouth suddenly yelled.

“Oh? You’re still alive? I thought the magnetism removal failed.”

Marie calmly said to the head yelling at her, not stopping at all as she continued to move on.

Vermouth looked over, and found AnchoR carrying RyuZU, with Naoto panting as he straggled at the back. Marie was at the front, tucking Vermouth and Halter’s heads under her armpits.

Intrigued, Vermouth asked,

“What…? What’s going on? How come that Mister’s left with a head too? Hey, ghost girl, mind speaking up and explain—what did you just do, you bitch!?”

Marie slammed Vermouth’s head, now in her right arm, onto the passing street lamp, making him shut up.

Halter’s cyborg body was too heavy, and too damaged to be repaired, so Marie took his head off. Vermouth felt some pity that he was unable to see Marie’s expression back then.

Naoto finally caught up to him, looking a little awkward, saying,

“…Ah, you really woke up at the wrong time, uncle…anyway, you’re okay, right?”

“Huh? Ah, so you’re the guy with this bitch? Ha—on what basis do you say that I’m alright here? The oxygen gauge meant to protect my head was damaged, and I could have died in another 3 seconds. My right eye’s probably gone, and I can’t really differentiate the colors. It’s amazing that I’m still alive, and if I’m called fine, that corpse should be called completely healthy with her limbs intact, huh?”

—This certainly was an energetic head to be able to prattle back a rattle.

Marie did train for this before, but holding a head in each arm and running at full speed was really an arduous activity. Though they were just heads, each of them was as heavy as a bowling ball.

She really had the urge to simply throw aside the head in her right arm, and narrowed her eyes.

There was nothing moving as the morning sun shone upon the streets of Akihabara, and flames were smoking everywhere, probably because of the scorched gears burning. The most concerning thing how was that for a while, Marie's ears could pick up some sort of rumbling from the underground.

—Surely this was the noise of this city being destroyed.

"Anyway, brat, how's my handsome face right now?"

"There's a really old robot movie with a guy who sank into a furnace of molten steel and melted, you know?"

"My artificial skin got melted!? What did you do to me, you damn slut—hey, this is abuse, right!?"

This time, she smashed Vermouth's head onto a passing guardrail, saying,

"Be good now, you hear?"

She angrily glared at the head that was raised to her eyes.

"Whether you end up in the trashbin or flushed down the toilet is up to my mood, and I'm feeling so bad right now, I'm thinking if I should just vent on you and heat you up to cook you—but this me who has a rare angelic kindness in the world has decided to keep you alive, so you shitty bastard should be touched to tears and swear loyalty to me, alright?"

"That's just a choice between a demon and the devil, right?"

Marie ignored Naoto's snark.

With a tender voice even a demon lord would be terrified by, she said.

"—Serve me, or you can go and die, okay♥?"

This is the meaning of your existence; Vermouth could hear the hidden conclusion, and muttered in surprise,

“—Hey, this bitch’s really crazy now.”

“It looks like you either prefer the trashbin, or the toilet?’

“Old man, if you really want to ask if she’s crazy, the answer’s yes. I won’t hurt you here, you better be a little more obedient here.”

“You gotta be kidding brat. Eh—think about it calmly, I too have the right to be angry, right!?”

“The right…but that’s based on ‘timing and location’, right…?”

Vermouth seemed to be enlightened by those words, and he said, looking impressed,

“…You’re still young, but you do know quite a lot, brat. Once I get saved, let’s go get a drink. it’s a deal.”

Marie was huffing after running this much, and upon hearing this deal, she gave a cold snort.

The Mansei Bridge—that was what they always called this place for a long time.

Marie lifted her sights slightly, and could see a massive contour dangling in the dawning sky. With the massive pillar reaching from earth to sky as the center there were many massive round plates overlapped on each other, each spanning a few kilometers in diameter.

These are the city grids that the Multiple Grid Tokyo.

At this point, they were located at this Grid Akihabara, the lowers level of Tokyo.

The bridge connecting this place to the Grid above was the destination Marie and the others were headed for.

(Now then—)

Marie turned her head around.

She stared at the ostentatious massive shadow blotting the morning sun—the gigantic spider that was stamping on the buildings and being blasse towards the city. Then, she said,

“Tell me right now. That weapon was created by combining the results from electromagnetic studies…right?”

“Why ask the obvious?”

Marie stopped.

The head in the right arm fell to the ground, and got stomped on by her.

“Don’t get cocky. Tell me ‘yes’ or ‘no; anything else, and I’ll kill you.”

“Yes.”

“Very good. Next question. What’s it trying to do next?”

“No.”

Marie immediately grabbed Vermouth’s head.

And then, she raised it without hesitation, throwing it over her head down at the Kanda river flowing right below her eyes.

Right when Vermouth was really going to get thrown down, Naoto stopped her,

“Calm down, marie. Don’t kill anyone in front of AnchoR.”

“Hey brat, I’m glad that you’re helping me, but that’s a weird reason, okay?”

Marie then grumbled, looking annoyed,

“I’m really an idiot actually think of relying on this guy—well, let’s ask just in case. AnchoR can at least take on take thing, right?”

If it was that overwhelming fighting ability that could match RyuZU’s ‘Mute Scream’—while Marie thought of this, AnchoR dejectedly shook her head.

“…Sorry…mama…”

“AnchoR needs to charge up right now. Don’t force her to deal with such a thing.”

Naoto buttered in to protect the girl.

After hearing that, Marie understood.

How the Perpetual Gear—which generated an infinite amount of heat such that ‘it remained in perpetual motion’, worked.

But one could tell that even if the power was infinite, there was a limit to the output.

Once the power usage was more than the regeneration, the backup power would start to be used.

The power drain was at its minimum, in the first gear. Once the spring started its initial motion, it could continue to run forever.

That why AnchoR was able to break free.

But after the battle with RyuZU, the severe damages and repairs, the remaining power AnchoR had stored in her 'Perpetual Gear' was almost completely gone.

If the gear was kicked on, the power drain would be beyond the output, and she would run out of power in a few minutes.

—In other words, they could not settle this with AnchoR's power.

Marie shook her head, groaning,

"Well, at the very least, if we know of that guy's intentions…"

"How many times must I say it now, Missy? You still have to ask when it's this obvious now?"

"Shut up, or I'll really throw you into the river."

"—Get real, you self-proclaimed genius. The pieces are all together. I'm disappointed if you still don't understand now, okay?"

"__"

After hearing those words, Marie shook her head, wanting to sort out the situation.

She admitted that she was really confused.

The cause of it all was the microwave message sent by this head.

They were tracking a signal down to the underground of Grid Mie, and found a massive weapon. It was a weapon that could destroy the weapon, developed by the 'military' technicians affiliated to Grid Shiga that were researching on the

illegal electromagnetic technology.

Then, the government wanted to restore its credibility after the failed purge of Kyoto, starting a large scale skirmish with Mie—the old Shiga ‘military’.

Marie’s group took the initiative to stop the conflict, getting all the civilians to evacuate through a terrorist announcement, and lured in the Tokyo ‘military’ Capital Defense Forces to the underground to take on the massive weapon.

However, all that they did was futile. They failed.

That one shock punctured through the city, and the continuous electromagnetic pulse caused Akihabara to be further destabilized. Furthermore, Halter barely managed to escape with his life, RyuZu was so damaged her functions stopped, and AnchoR was lacking in power. Marie was left completely powerful in the magnetized streets.

All their plans were crushed, and their fighting strength completely nullified.

—Till this point, she had yet to recover from that shock.

(The pieces are here…? What does that mean—no…my mind’s just going blank without thinking of anything.)

Marie gritted her teeth in frustration.

But at that moment.

Naoto suddenly lifted his head.

That was the terrifying face she just saw—but that face clearly showed that he ‘saw through everything’.

He gave a piercing glare at the gigantic spider that was blocking out the sun, and said,

“…’nothing’…is that what that shit is doing?”

Upon hearing those words, Marie looked over, dumbfounded.

Immediately, Vermouth's laugh echoed through this doomsday Akihabara, and AnchoR's shoulders jolted.

"Ha—hahahaha! You really are good there, brat! Hey Missy, you really picked up someone interesting!"

"What do you…mean?"

—Again.

It seemed there was again something she did not know, a discussion she could not understand.

This anxious frustration caused Marie to frown in an annoyed manner.

Vermouth then said heartily,

"In any case…that thing over there is just appearing there. This itself—is already the worst possible scenario for the 'government'. It's like the Queen suddenly appearing on the chessboard in front of the king. It's just a con—but the winner's decided."

—She did not understand.

What exactly did this guy and Naoto see and felt to get that conclusion—

"—Missy."

Vermouth tried to hold in his laughter as he said,

"Sorry for saying this, but you're just a kid who has yet to know the world. How innocent of you."

"Wha—"

"As for that brat—well, you're cute, and you have such cruel thoughts there. You really have the potential to be a real shitty bastard there, you know?"

"I'm already used to being called a pervert, but I'm against being called a shitty bastard, okay~?"

Naoto pouted unhappily.

—In summary, Vermouth concluded.

“It’s like what that brat said. They’re just waiting for the ‘government to self-destruct’—checkmate.”

Chapter 1 – 07:20 – Explorer

Currently, on this ‘Clockwork Planet’, humans are living on gigantic gears.

And amongst them, the major cities during the old era–before the Earth was mechanized and fitted with gears, like the capital of developed nations, or economic hubs, were uniquely designed to be distinctly different from ordinary cities.

The Multi Grid Tokyo was one of them.

It is the core of Japan, formed by multiple city grids overlapped over each other. Hailed as the largest population in the country, the governance, authority, communications, education, industries and cultures–all the them were considered the apex in the country, and could be said to be a complex city, a compressed essence of Japan itself.

And so, amongst them, the ‘governance’ core itself was at Grid Kasumigaseki.

It was the city of governance with many ministry buildings located there, spearheaded by the National Diet Building.

This was typically a peaceful city, where all the public sector workers would be quietly doing their work.

But on this day, the city appeared to be in a state of war from the middle of the night, until the morning.

The Defense Bureau and National Police Agency staff were scurrying around, looking utterly determined, and the Resonance Communications was filled with groans and curses from the intelligence and inspection officers associated to each bureau.

At this moment, in a certain Senate room located at Kasumigaseki in the ruling party’s headquarters, the counter-terrorist council were having a meeting.

“–So? What happened?”

The current Prime Minister slowly inquired.

He ignored the uproar that occurred since the middle of the night, and dawdled his way in only when it was morning; at this moment, he leisurely arrived at the head seat, and gave a skeptical face.

“I heard that there was a terrorist incident in the middle of the night. Is it suppressed now?”

“–Mr Prime Minister, I do say that the situation is more dire than that.”

Upon hearing the response of the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the Prime Minister gave a perturbed frown.

“Is there an instance of civilians being hurt? You really are worrying me here. The Cabinet was just established, and if the approval ratings are to all again…”

“That is not all that is. Right now, Grid Akihabara is in a state of complete cessation.”

The Prime Minister looked stupefied, asking,

“What?”

“And right now, a certain massive weapon of an unknown military force is currently occupying Akihabara.”

The Prime Minister’s mouth was wide open as he muttered,

“An unknown, massive weapon…?”

“It can be said to be a gigantic–Super Dreadnought level of a land mobile armor. Before dawn, it took on the 7th Aerial Squad in Grid Yokosuka, and annihilated all of them…”

Having heard of this report for the first time, the Prime Minister looked somewhat anxious as he gave a perturbed face.

“Wait, you are really worrying me here. Those fighter jets are rather expensive, aren’t they? Didn’t we just cut the defense budget last year too? Now the media’s going to attack us for it.”

“As I said, there is something more dire than this, Mr Prime Minister.”

“Mr Prime Minister, please listen to his explanation.”

The ruling party’s Chief Secretary interrupted from the side, and pointed at a

man.

The young man was probably in his early 30s. He was tall and frail, looking a little unreliable. His hair was casually tied up, and he was dressed in a casual jacket and denim pants. Such a racy flair was a distinct sight from the officials dressed in suit.

“…And you are?”

The Prime Minister asked, looking suspicious. The man showed a smile devoid of tension as he answered,

“It is our first meeting. My name is Yuu Karasawa, a civilian Meister–I was deployed here as a consultant for the Technology Bureau.”

“A Meister…?”

The Prime Minister looked skeptical, and Karasawa showed the ‘Chrono Compass’–the proof of a Meister.

Once the basic identity check was done, he continued on, smiling,

“To be honest, the current situation is in the worst predicament. Grid Akihabara is currently occupied by the armed forces–and if this massive weapon is to invade the other Grids, the damage will continue to spread.”

“Then what are you hesitating for? Shouldn’t you be off to suppress those terrorists? This is why the ‘military’ exists, right?”

Karasawa continued to smile even as the Prime Minister looked displeased, and calmly answered.

“It is not that simple. When the terrorist activity occurred in the middle of the night, the capital defense forces discovered a massive weapon, and entered the underground to take it head on, but–they were all annihilated.”

“Huh”

“And the 7th Aerial Squad that was shot down had the latest CzFG-11 planes. Coupled with the fact that the pilots were highly proficient, and they are the strongest aerial forces the ‘military’ had.”

And also,

“More importantly, once it was observed that they were wiped out, there was an attempt to attack the weapon directly using the Capital Defense Cannon…the

cannon did hit the target, but it did not bring about much effective damage on the target's armor."

The Prime Minister was dumbfounded, and turned to look at the Defense Minister,

"…What have you been spending the yearly Defense budget on? You can't suppress a mere terrorist cell?"

The Defense Minister's face was red, and he hushed his voice, answering,

"If I may say, the armed forces we have are just ordinary weaponry meant for city combat. We did not have the massive firepower needed to tackle such a scenario."

"Defending the city is the job of your people, right? You made the suppression of a terrorist cell so gaudy, it is a problem here."

"…Our responsibility here is to defend against the invasion from foreign militaries. It is completely unexpected that a massive weapon of destruction would appear in our own soil."

"I don't know anything about military affairs."

The Prime Minister, legally the commander-in-chief, continued on,

"Can't you hurry and destroy it with some guided missiles or anything?"

Karasawa amicably interrupted,

"–The enemy does have the anti-air firepower to take out the latest weaponry, you know? Also, it has armor strong enough to withstand a direct hit from the Capital Defense Cannon. Do you intend to fire LAMS missiles onto your own country?"

"…LAMS?"

"A mechanized bomb designated to eliminate any traces…in old terms, it would be a nuclear bomb."

"Ah, ahh…if that is the case, you could have said so right from the beginning. The specialists love their acronyms–no, just no. The people will revolt. What does the 'military' intend to do?"

The prime minister immediately shook his head, and Karasawa informed him, his

voice clearly forceful at this point,.

“In conclusion, the current situation is that it is impossible to take down that military force through brute force alone.”

“I will be troubled if you said that. That is merely the incompetence of the ‘military’, no? This responsibility–”

“It doesn’t matter who should take responsibility here.”

The Chief Cabinet Minister coldly interrupted.

He was said to be a political with a steel-like endurance. At this moment, even he could not hide his face and voice as a grim look began to appear on his face.

“You got it? Right now, Grid Akihabara is in functional breakdown because of the terrorist weapon. In fact, it is no different from being destroyed. If we leave it alone, it will only be a matter of time before the other Grids are wrecked. We have no choice but to counter it quickly.”

“I did say that it is the ‘military’–”

“The current situation is at a point where the ‘military’ fighting strength can’t settle this. This is why we have to think of countermeasures, and your decision is imperious, Mr Prime Minister.”

“Mine?”

“We have to hurry and purge Grid Akihabara. I wish to have your permit.”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary’s words caused the Prime Minister to be dumbfounded.

“What are you saying now? How can I possibly do such a thing?”

“There is no other way.”

At this point, Karasawa lost his smile for the first time. He raised his hand and stood up, interrupting them,

“Ah, my apologies. As the consultant, purging Grid Akihabara is not something I really would like to recommend…”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary turned his head around, glaring sharply at Karasawa.

“–For what reasons?”

“Akihabara is not just a single city. Structure-wise, it is an important part to the functioning of the Multi Grid Tokyo. To purge it will certainly affect the other Grids.”

“But that is what purging is all about?”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary brusquely noted.

“And also, Akihabara is no different from being wrecked now because of that weapon. based on their saying, it would have affected the other Grids now, I suppose?”

“Of course that is the case. Akihabara’s functional failure at this point is causing a burden on the other Grids now.”

“How long can we keep this up?”

“It is fine if it is today or tomorrow, but certainly not half a year.”

“How much can you repair Akihabara in this half a year?”

“We have to look at the extent of the damage. It might be hard to tell at this point, but with the full assistance of the ‘Guild’, I would say that it is not impossible to–”

“There is nothing to talk about here.”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary cut off Karasawa’s words.

“I know you want to boast about your old nest’s abilities, but I cannot allow you putting an uncertain observation as a wish and ignoring such a reality facing you–Prime Minister!”

The Secretary ignored Karasawa’s objection as he forced the Prime Minister’s hands.

That ferocious sight of his caused the Prime Minister to be greatly intimidated. The latter’s forehead was oozing sweat, but he staggered and voiced his opposition.

“But…what about the people? Didn’t such a thing happen a few days ago? if we have to carry out a forced purge here in such a situation, the social backlash… would be terrible, no?”

“It has been more than 8 hours since the incident happened in the middle of the night. It’s a Grid with few people living in it in the first place, and they were all evacuated.”

“Wait, Secretary! That decision is too hasty!”

A female senator, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, suddenly exclaimed.

“The is still a chance for Akihabara to be restored, right? And we have yet to be sure of who we are dealing with and their objectives.. Should we first think of negotiating with the criminal group?”

“Is this the time to think about this so leisurely? I say we should take action decisively. Maybe problems will happen in the future, but isn’t it our priority to deal with the situation now?”

“Purging Akihabara is not simply a problem for our country alone! The other countries’ reactions will also–”

“If we can hurry and deal with this current situation, we can explain our way out of this no matter what happens.”

“What are you saying now!? It’s because of such discreteness that caused the folly of previous government administrations, no? If we are being heavy-handed in this, it is inevitable that the other countries will condemn us!”

“It is your job to deal with this, right?”

“I cannot agree with that thinking at all! First, we need to peacefully settle this–”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary and foreign minister were yelling away.

And the Prime Minister, sandwiched in the middle, was looking gaudy.

That anxious face was practically saying ‘what about the next elections?’

(Did I make a mistake in coming here…?)

And Karasawa, slouched on the chair, could only mutter in his heart.

He, viewed as an outsider, could only watch their bickering as he sighed in annoyance.

–It was unbecoming of them.

The man in charge was overly incompetent, had no views, and could not make any decisions.

The man who accurately grasped the situation was more practically proactive, but his ideas were too radical.

And the woman who understood the situation was an idealist, and perhaps it was unlikely of her to come up with some actual actions.

–Nothing had changed ever since a thousand years ago.

No, perhaps it had been this way since 2000 years ago. This is 'politics'.

His old refuge, the 'Meister Guild'–a non-profit organization that worked beyond borders, was not completely spared from this.

Perhaps such a power game was part of human nature…

Karasawa calmy observed them,and narrowed his eyes.

(I wonder if Professor Marie…and Professor Conrad are fine…)

He had accurately grasped the situation of the 'Akihabara Terrorist Incident' that happened during the night.

Or rather, he was one of the accomplices involved in cleaning up the mess.

His previous job was as a member of the Communications branch of the 'Meister Guild' First Division, second team–the team led by Marie.

And it was due to Marie's request for help that he agreed to assist immediately…

(…But this situation has deviated from what we were talking about.)

He never showed any emotion, merely grumbling in his heart.

Leaving aside the massive weapon, the collapse of Grid Akihabara was never in the plans.

In other words, their plan failed.

As for how they should deal with it, they would be contacting him at any given moment now–

Karasawa witnessed the squabbling going on, and sighed for the umpteenth time on this day.

“I wonder if I can get some overtime pay…”

The sun was hanging high up in the sky.

The dazzlingly white sunlight was warm, raining evenly all over the city.

But even though it was the day, there were some places where the sunlight could not reach them.

In a dusty, messy underground street located in a corner of Grid Ueno–though it appeared to be rather bustling at night, it was devoid of people at this time, silent, with the shutters pulled.

But even at this time and place, there was a shop that remained functional.

The crude neon gear spun lazily, showing the filthy shop decorations.

There was no door on this shop. One could hear some light-hearted music from inside, but the shop was designed such that nobody could look inside from the entrance.

The trio were standing in front of this shop.

One of them was an extremely frail boy–Naoto, and he quietly muttered the name on the display.

“Strip the Ueno…?”

Marie instinctively lowered her sights..

The old poster plastered on the wall entered her sights.

“A replication of 150%! Everything, an all-around rotation where everything can be seen–!”

And along with such an inciting line was a girl automata of a similar age to Marie, posing in overly teasing or stimulating poses that defiled her common sense of shame, and defied the common moral conscience when it came to sex.

“–!”

Marie instinctively turned her face aside.

There seemed to be something…no, one might say that everything was filthy and lewd, impure. She could be said to be completely reviled by it. She did not want to think anything about the ‘replication’ of doing 150% to it.

AnchoR was carrying RyuZU on her back, and she asked with interest,

“Papa? What is this shop…?”

“Ah, well, it’ll always be too early for you, so you shouldn’t ask~…”

Naoto merely passed it off, and he muttered to Marie beside him,

“Well…hey, is this really the address?”

“…I guess, so…yeah, it’s true.”

“But Marie.”

“Don’t say it.”

“Even if you won’t, I will. This is a shop that feels R18 no matter what, right!?”

“I don’t know!? The address leads here as far as I know!”

Marie yelled, her face blushing.

The duo hollered as they stood at the entrance of this shop, which clearly appeared to be a backalley fetish shop.

In other words, a strip club.

This was not a shop where naked women danced. The playtoy automata would wear extremely lewd clothing, do erotic dances for the onlookers, and provide lewd services–this was a club akin to a chemical reaction, where a deviation in modern society had a chemical reaction with a group of art enthusiasts with exquisite tastes.

Typically, Marie would not give a glance to it, let alone visit it–

But no matter how many times they affirmed this, this was where Conrad instructed them to head to, the rendezvous in cases of emergency.

And at this moment, someone exited from the shop, perhaps having heard of the

commotion outside.

It was a graceful old man dressed in an exquisite suit.

“Professor Marie–thank goodness. Are you alright?”

Marie had completely frozen.

Standing there was Conrad, as expected. The unique monocle reflected the colorful lights from the neon gear–and it did not match him at all.

“Professor Marie, what happened!? What exactly–”

—*That’s what I want to ask*, Marie thought.

No, there was too many things to discuss and inform, and she felt relieved after meeting this old man. However–as this was this place, she really could not be happy at all.

Feeling extremely worn out, Marie asked,

“Erm…Professor Conrad, actually…there are materials…here, right?”

“Of course. Now then, let us head in.”

Where would the ‘of course’ come from…?

Marie did not understand, but they could not discuss anything at the door, and with prompting, she went into the shop.

…However, she really had to squeeze out lots of courage just to step into the threshold.

She heard Naoto’s careful instructions to AnchoR from behind.

“AnchoR, this will be bad for your mental health, so just look down no matter what.”

“…? I understand…”

“–Hm, I see…it is more serious than I expected.”

Conrad noted sternly as he walked in front, but to be honest, Marie could not

listen to anything at all.

–This space filled with ahan'ufun certainly caused all sense of tension to be gone.

The shop was basically as what Marie expected, and beyond expected.

Red light filled the shop, and it was a little dim. The areas where the automata were supposed to dance on stage were unfiltered. The BGM was intense, exotic.

The next issue was the leather sofa placed along the aisle.

That probably was the audience seat. Due to the screen, it was hard to peek inside.

–But why is there a 'leg' stretching out above the screen? What is the body posture like!? What is the creaking on the sofa about? What's with the 'I'm coming'? What miracle is that female underwear that suddenly flew above their heads!?

–Decadent. Wretched. Immoral!!

Marie was blushing furiously as she kept her eyes right in front.

But at the next moment, she spotted an automata with an amazing body showing off her amazing assets, giving an erotic wink.

Marie wordlessly looked afar.

The big sister automata gave Conrad a teasing pose, and then approached the strange acting Naoto, who was so tense he was frozen all over.

"Woah!?"

Naoto let out a squeal, for he was stroked on the butt.

AnchoR, who obediently looked down as she stood beside Naoto, asked in confusion,

"…? Papa, what's the matter?"

"Ah, ahwawa…kids shouldn't be looking!"

"You, too, mustn't look! Or rather, I'm bad with this myself in the first place!"

Marie could not help but interject.

Upon hearing Marie's reaction, Vermouth, held under her armpit, mocked,

"Hahaha, relax, Missy. Is this your first time at such a shop? I heard that you changed jobs to be a terrorist? Now there's no need to worry about some boring laws now."

"That isn't the issue!"

–It's really impossible for me to say the word 'lewd' in front of Professor Conrad'.

After passing through this unhealthy space, the gang entered the back room. They then head down the stairs in a single file to the basement, and at the end of it, there was a wide room.

"We're here. Though it does appear messy."

The room they were brought to looked a lot more decent than the one above.

There was none of the lewd things they could see or touch. The lights were white, and there was no rowdy music to be heard. Placed inside were simple beds, sofa, table, and simple living tools.

Deep inside was a thick door. It seemed there was a workshop behind it.

Having calmed down a lot more, Marie inhaled deeply.

Then, she asked a question she really wanted to ask.

"I want to be sure of the situation…Professor Conrad. But before that, may I ask something? Why this place?"

Conrad looked perplexed in the face of this question.

"It is a fine place, right? Just as you like it, don't you?"

"Do you think I like this?"

Marie coldly retorted, and Vermouth giggled, saying,

"Right? Isn't this a fine shop. Please allow me to visit with my lower body the next time."

"I'll give you a coupon later. An all-day discount is possible."

Conrad noted amicably, and Vermouth chuckled,

“You really are understanding unlike what your appearance implies, old man. Now then, I’ll be really grateful if you give me a smoke.”

“Sorry. I stopped smoking for a few years already.”

“Now that’s a pity. Tobacco is the duty of a man, old man.”

“At my age, I’m happy with a glass of Scotch.”

“…Professor Conrad!”

Marie glared at the old gentleman with a venomous look.

Conrad raised his hands in defeat, and gently told her,

“This shop belongs to my acquaintance.”

“Professor Conrad!?”

“Yes, the boss is an old acquaintance of mine, and he does treat me to some drinks from time to time. As payment, I’m in charge of maintaining the girls, you know? That’s basically it.”

“That’s impossible. The arms of a Meister are used for this…!?”

Marie widened her eyes in shock.

Conrad was amused by this girl who was like a granddaughter to him, shrugging,

“It appeared they’re rather popular because their dancing skills have improved. Of course, he happily allowed me to use this place as a shelter.”

Also, he added mysteriously,

“I can’t say this out loud, but this is also an illegal auction place for automata.”

“–Huh?”

“In other words, this is a black market for premier automata with illegal added parts that are male-oriented. Organizations are involved, and they’ll close an eye on this, so this is the best to hide a workshop.”

“Wow, the government is corrupted…”

Naoto muttered unhappily.

Marie felt a heavy bump on her head as she cupped it, sighing,

–*Yes, it was truly logical.*

It really was to be expected of the Englishman Professor Conrad, who had a workshop in Grid Akihabara, to have so many relations in the far foreign country of Japan.

The workshops were inferior to an actual one, but the basic equipment were there. Though they were not hoping for military equipment, there was naturally a large number of illegal, superior parts.

But to be honest…

(While that is the case…I can't just pass things off like this!?)

Till this point, Marie had thought of him as an outstanding gentleman, a senior worth respecting. As a technician, she learned a lot of things from this Professor Conrad–

But the rare sight of him **was a pervert, one similar to Naoto**…!

Having realized this reality, she felt utter despair, her footing practically beginning to collapse.

"Well…leaving aside that."

She shook her head, and bucked up. There were more pressing issues at hand.

Marie raised a head she was holding under her armpit–Halter's, and said,

"Anyway, please help maintain his life, okay? There's magnetism…but if the brain inside is fine, he can probably be saved when the outer casing is swapped.

Of course, the premise was that if he was still alive, but Marie did not say it.

–As Vermouth had said, it was a miracle he was still alive, for the head was hot due to the magnetism. The life maintenance device might be wrecked before it was activated–Marie did not want to think of it this way, but his brain might have been dead. She could not guarantee at all–as to whether he was still alive.

Conrad nodded understandingly, saying,

"Hm…I suppose a brain transplant is needed. Amongst the unlicensed doctors I know of, I do know one with such an expertise. I'll make the arrangements

immediately.”

“Please. Also…”

Marie hesitated, saying,

“–Professor, are you able to get spare parts for Halter’s body? In around 2-3 hours…no, within 1-2 hours.”

“…I suppose that will be impossible now.”

“–”

“First off, it’s extremely difficult to obtain ‘military prosthetics’ at this point, and dangerous at that. To be honest, there was a plainclothes investigator who just came by, and passed by all of you. This isn’t a military market, and has something to do with the politicians.”

“…”

“It’s likely that the black market dealers in Tokyo are being investigated. Right now, it’s impossible to obtain military parts in Japan. The moment we obtain them, we’ll be eyed immediately.”

“Is that, so…?”

In that case, what could they do?

She knew very well that her hopes were slim, but her heart still sank after having this fact pointed out.

Upon seeing Marie give such a bleak look, Conrad gently comforted,

“…First, we have to hurry and put his brain on the life support. We’ll then think of the prosthetics afterwards.”

“Okay. I’ll leave this to you.”

Conrad received Halter’s head, and quickly left the room.

Marie then proceeded to pat her face.

There was no time to waste. She turned around, and said to Naoto, who was in a corner of the room.

“Naoto, bring RyuZU into the workshop. Also…use anything suitable parts to make a fan and cool it down.”

Naoto nodded, and asked in surprise,

“Ahh…but won’t water or ice cool it faster?”

“Seriously…what did you learn in school anyway? If you cool down something hot too quickly, it’ll either crack or deform–my diagnosis is that you should should do this for RyuZU, so trust me.”

Marie said, wondering,

–I just said something unreasonable, but–

AnchoR sensed Marie’s stare, and nervously lifted her head,

“? Mama?”

“Don’t call me that.”

Marie gave a brief reminder, and averted her eyes.

Halter’s anti-magnetism installation was the strongest in this world. It was designed such that for brief moments, it would be able to function within the faux-electromagnetic field created by the of the ‘Planet Governor’s electromagnetic filter.

However, the electromagnetic pulse from that weapon easily pierced through the filter.

Considering the fact that those automata could easily repel such powerful electromagnetic fields, and even remove their own magnetism–there was only one conclusion.

–‘Y’ did consider the idea of ‘an electromagnetic attack’ right from the beginning.

This cute looking thing, tilting her head skeptically while saying unreasonable things, was the proof of this. In that case, RyuZU could be repaired once she cooled down–and Marie firmly believed in that.

“_”

…How foolish.

Halter's prosthetics–a realization of the Breguet's full proficiency in technology, could not withstand against it, but an antique built 1,000 years ago could continue like it was nothing?

–Then what have we been doing till this point?

Marie felt the futility of all the technology she learned till this point, the humiliation, and how worthless she was as these emotions struck her chest.

However, she could not show them, for it would be unbecoming of her.

She held in the peeved emotions within her, sighed, and entered the workshop.

"…Heh?"

After a glance into the workshop, she found there were some unexpectedly decent equipment inside.

There were some models that were a little dated, but there was work machines that could be used for cutting and creating parts, and there were also hangers to hang automata, and a work desk for professional technicians to use.

For a workshop for personal use, this could be said to be the best facility possible.

"As to be expected of you, Professor Conrad…"

Perhaps she should forget the fact that this was a place to repair the dancing automata up there.

Naoto followed from behind, asking in affirmation,

"Oi Marie. Do I use this hanger to put RyuZU up?"

"Yeah sure."

"Got it–now then, AnchoR, I'll leave it to you."

Okay, AnchoR chirped cheerfully as she brought her older sister to the hanger closest to the work desk, dangling it from there.

Once she was brought under a bright spot, it was obvious that RyuZU took great damage.

The biggest damage to her was the abdomen. Her clothes, and even her artificial skin were melted and worn off, showing the insides. The extremely fine cables that appeared to be nerves caused were snapped, spreading out like a bundle. The parts appeared to have taken quite some damage, and the spine could be seen even without opening the abdomen.

The skeletal contortion was more severe than Marie assumed. If she was to let RyuZU regain mobility and not correct it, it was likely the latter could not move.

If the surface appeared to be so severe in damage, what exactly was the extent of damage inside?

Naoto too watched RyuZU uneasily.

RyuZU's damage seemed to cause him more pain than his own burn, but also– there was something–

"…Papa, can sister…be saved?"

AnchoR asked cautiously.

Naoto immediately changed his expression, smiling at her.

"Of course! We're doing this because RyuZU needs this. Of course she'll be saved. You don't have to worry, AnchoR."

Saying that, he patted the head of the girl who lowered her shoulders dejectedly.

–Though that was the hand that had a bad burn.

Marie let out a little sigh, went back the previous room, opening the first-aid box placed right next to the entrance of the room, took out something from it, and returned to the workshop.

"Hey, you need to just your burn treated."

Marie took a syringe from the kit, saying to Naoto,

"This is a nanobot used for medical treatment. If you don't want to die of pus forming from the burn, strip and sit there."

"…Ah, thank you."

After a brief thanks, Naoto did as he was told obediently.

He scowled as he slowly took off his burnt clothes, and sat at where Marie indicated.

Marie peeled off the membrane at the tip of the syringe–as thick as a juice can, and coldly noted,

“I’ll say this first, but I don’t think you’ll be able to get treated completely. There’ll still be scarring–if you don’t get an artificial skin or a skin graft.”

“It’s fine. Best possible case is that I can move.”

Marie sighed.

She aimed the syringe at the back burn on Naoto that was as bad as she thought, and began injecting.

The needleless syringe let loose, injecting a lot of nanomachines used for medical treatment along with the solution. These nanomachines had the effect of disinfecting, boosting regeneration, and being a placeholder for body functions.

To be honest, Marie was **probing** at this point.

The medical nanomachines were highly potent, but after injecting, there would be a sharp pain.

And she did not warn Naoto about this.

The nevers from the muscles to the skin would be influenced by the nanomachines, and he would feel great pain as a result. Even an adult man would yelp in pain due to this unbearable sensation, but Naoto never did whimper all this time.

Marie did not think he did not feel pain.

The proof was that his face was wincing, and he was clenching his fists firmly, shivering.

However, Naoto never did groan until the very end, and merely exhaled heavily at the end.

“Wait. I’ll get you some fitting clothes.”

“Ah, sorry about that. Thanks.”

Feeling some sort of setback, Marie left the room.

It was all because she said they had to do this that Naoto dragged a scorching RyuZu and moved her around.

The expression Naoto showed, what he said, and his attitude repeated in her mind over and over again.

…It's likely. Marie thought.

No, that's not it. Surely, if it's that guy, that big idiot–

–If he feels there's a 'need' for it, he'll cut off his limbs without hesitation.

She felt a chill run up her spine.

That expression, that face, all of it was imprinted in her mind, affirming her belief.

It was something different from realization–it was as though it was 'a matter of fact', and it was somehow–

Having finally found a change of clothes, Marie returned to the workshop Naoto and the others were at.

She handed over the T shirt with the theater logo print on, probably some campaign item, to Naoto.

Naoto slipped on the sleeve of the shirt, seemed to have thought of something, and said,

"Anyway, what about that uncle there?"

He was looking at the live head that was casually tossed onto the work desk.

Vermouth, the sight of attention this time, noted with displeasure.

"Do you guys even have any conscience? If you forgot, I can help you remember. It's not strange if I'm to die at any given moment. Hurry and get me on some life support."

"…Seriously, why is this guy too so…"

Well, whatever, Marie shook her head.

She ignored the back of Naoto's T-shirt that was covered with the erotic sight of automata spreading their thighs wide, saying,

"Anyway, I can't let you rest for now. I still got some things to ask.

"Spare me already…w-wait, wait wait wait, you bitch!? Why do I get the feeling that you're up to no good again!?"

"We'll find you a suitable automata befitting your body, and we'll get you on life support, so relax."

"Are you seriously brain dead, you bitch!? You're already think of attaching me to some blowjob doll!? What do you think a man's pride is about!?"

"That's no such thing."

Marie coldly stated, and hung the automata on the hanger, putting her on the workdesk.

Then, she carelessly–or so it appeared to Naoto–detached an automata head, and latched Vermouth's heart on it with a click.

"Shit, are you serious, you crazy bitchass of a princess…!?"

Vermouth felt a chill as he stared at this self-proclaimed genius.

It was not an abhorrence of a feminine body. He had to admit that this naive brat was capable enough to be considered as a genius.

–A cyborg had completely different functions from an automata.

One was a replication of a human body's 'construct', while the other was about a human's 'function'.

In simple terms, an automata did not contain a 'brain'. Depending on the functions, there were some that could continue running even without a head.

But on the other hand, a cyborg body had a 'brain'. Thus, all prosthetics has to replicate most of a person's original body. If not, the 'brain' would reject. In other words, this brat simply swapped his head with an automata, and his 'brain' did not think that anything was amiss.

And most surprisingly, he did not know when the life support was attached.

Feeling impressed, Vermouth muttered,

"–I see, so you aren't a ghost, but a demon now? Sorry for saying so much about you before, Missy. If you're a demon, being horny is obviously–warrgh!?"

The sharp sensation from the nerves caused Vermouth much pain, and he screamed in agony.

Marie finished the work behind his back, and chirped,

"Now then, let's sort this situation out."

The counter terrorist committee meeting was in utter chaos.

Having realized the direness and danger of the situation, discussions were in full swing.

Anyway, we should begin the purge. No, negotiate with the criminals. How about we draft in the nearby Grids military and attack? We should first think of evacuating. We should coordinate with the other counties."

There were all kinds of views and objections, and they just could not make a decision.

In conclusion, there was no progression in the debates at all.

The Chief Secretary who was in favor of purging raised his hand, saying,

"Luckily, considering the angle, we won't have to worry about the 'Heaven's Pillar' being hit, right–?"

"Are you still sleeping?"

The Defense Minister chided,

"They have a 'main cannon' that shot through Grid Akihabara, an entire city Grid, and it's something that can definitely shoot through anything! That thing dares to appear in the 'lowest level' of Akihabara because it gets to have the entire capital in its firing range from below, you know!? Do you not understand anything about this!?"

Another Senator yelled agitatedly,

“Speaking of which, what is that weapon actually? The power of that ‘main cannon’, it came from the deep underground, and all, aren’t those capabilities overly ridiculous or something…?”

Saying that, he stood up, scanning through those present.

Then, he thought of the existence of the civilian consultant sitting in a corner.

The consultant who was questioned–Karasawa, looked perplexed as he tilted his head.

“Are you asking me?”

“Who else?”

“Thank goodness for that. I thought you had forgotten about me.”

Karasawa giggled as he scratched his head, and stood up,

“Eh–regarding that enemy weapon, I can answer, but it’s just my theory.”

“Come straight now! What kind of a consultant are you anyway?”

“Pardon my words, but I am simply a technician hired as a consultant here–I am not well versed in electromagnetic technology that defied International regulations.”

The Senate immediately went silent, and the Senator questioning Karasawa looked utterly dumbfounded.

Another Senator looked pale as he asked,

“Electromagnetic technology, you say?”

“Yes. I read through every single word in the report, but I cannot find any explanation other than that.”

Karasawa continued with a clear, permeating voice,

“First, I could not think of anything with regards to the ‘main cannon’ that shot through Grid Akihabara. However, there was an electromagnetic pulse afterwards. The armor that withstood the Capital Defense Cannon was an electromagnetic armor or something similar, and what shot the planes down were probably electromagnetic accelerated cannons.”

Looks of terror appeared on the Senators' faces as they groaned.

The Senator remained hopeful, asking,

"What are the chances of it being some kind of a new technology?"

"That will be impossible. No matter how it is used, a clockwork construct cannot replicate such a phenomenon–yet that weapon did it twice."

That was,

"Grid Akihabara was completely magnetized–and most importantly, the Resonance Cannon of the Capital Defense Forces was completely nullified. Neither of these two points can be explained by the theories and explanations of what the 5 Great Enterprises are researching.

There was also the possibility of the armor that withstood the Capital Defense Cannon being made of complex alloy. A supersonic cannon could be a plausible explanation of shooting down the fighter jets.

However, it was theoretically impossible to nullify a Resonance Cannon. To create an anti-resonance phenomenon, it was not about the materials–one could only deduce that there there was something on the surface that would not cause it to vibrate.

Also, considering the fact that Grid Akihabara was magnetized–it was a naturally conclusion that the machine contained electromagnetism.

"–But you're an amateur! How can you conclude that!?"

The Senator who raised the initial question said, having been jolted back,

Karasawa chuckled,

"Well, if I am well versed in electromagnetism, that obviously means that I am a culprit–and against the technology clauses in the ISS, you know? Research on it be forbidden, but isn't the more pressing issue why Japan has something that has extensive use of this?"

The Senator who managed to gather himself looked paler than paper.

–Such a thing surely would not pop out so randomly. It probably was something Japan had researched on a long time ago. The ones who knew about that should be present.

That was what Karasawa was hinting at.

This heavy duty bomb unleashed by a civilian rattled every Senator, and they became uneasy.

“Wh-what proof do you have?”

“Yeah! If you don’t have any proof, stop guessing blindly there!”

“Well, pardon me for that.”

With the needle-like stares of the surrounding people, Karasawa calmly noted,

“But the threat does exists right below us. I am simply narrating my thoughts on this as a consultant.”

And the rowdy Diet room immediately went speechless.

However, they began to probe each other, and the atmosphere of skepticism caused more confusion amongst the members than before.

(If I’m to contact the ISS right now, this country will be in a deadlock…)

Karasawa sat, harboring such dangerous notions.

If the other countries were to know of this fact, they should at least agree in unison install any sanctions on Japan they could think of.

(Well, the problem is that the weapon is aimed at this government…and then what?)

Would it become an excuse for this situation?

This involved the international regulations that the ISS and relevant organizations had.

However, this was the situation Karasawa understood–

First, the use of electromagnetic technology.

Second, a weapon that is built can cause great devastation to a city Grid.

Third, Considering limited resources, mass depletion of resources that were of no benefit to the planet's operation.

Fourth, Anon-fixed cannon capable of shooting 50km.

Fifth, The above–**that is done without the special approval or security issues from the ISS.**

These 5 issues alone were a breach of the ISS, and also trampled over at least two clauses of the clauses of the International Security Council (INSC), The International Electromagnetic Council (IEC), the World Commodities Organization (WCO).

(…However, in that case, everyone's caught in an ant trap.)

Yes–every country had such a thing, no exceptions.

There was no country that abided by such a rule, even if it was a third world country that was not worth mentioning. At the very least, that was the belief they had in each other–and because of that, no need for any surveillance.

Thus, once it was discovered, all a country would face were penalties.

However, the problem was–that the weapon was not under the government's control.

(To be honest, if it invades the other countries, things will get easier.)

Karasawa pondered about the chaos that would ensue.

In that case, each country would settle this while 'military judgement'. No matter how forbidden that powerful weapon might be, it could not continue to run forever. Surely, it was a matter of fact that it would be crushed in a battle of attrition.

No matter how potent that weapon was, it was still a single 'fighting strength'. That alone would not be enough to break the world's power balance, and tactically, a powerful single unit would be hard to capitalize on.

However, it did not do anything, except to aim the cannon at its own country… why?

Karasawa stared at the muttering Diet–the sleazy politicians who were going from probing to backstabbing each other, and suddenly realized.

–I see. So that's what they're aiming at? Those bastards.

"…So in other words, that weapon can just stay there, and that's all? The government and Military will just self-destruct–that's why you're saying that they won't do anything?"

Marie muttered with a trembling voice.

Having considered all this, that weapon–no, the enemies were probably inside them, not going to move.

Vermouth nodded his eyes to indicate his agreement, and said,

"But if this guess is correct, we have a problem…right brat?"

"Yeah, because those guys won't let things end off like this."

"What do you mean?"

Marie did not understand the meaning of their conversation, and scowled.

Naoto sighed and shook his head, answering,

"Well, you can say that the weapon isn't moving…at the same time though, 'it can't move'."

"…"

"I don't know anything about electromagnetic technology…but it can't move without a power source, right?"

"Well…I guess there's probably a battery or a generator or something."

Marie's words seemed to confirm Naoto's doubts, and he nodded,

"It's probably powered by gears."

"Huh?"

Marie opened her mouth in shock.

This weapon contained technology and armaments that destroyed all gear functions, but the weapon itself was built through gear technology…? Would it not be self-destruction?

While Marie showed a look of doubt on her face, Vermouth said,

“I think they combined the use of insulators and conducting gears. It’s not simply a usage of old technology–I’ll say it’s a hybrid that fuses clockwork and electromagnetism.

Marie frowned upon hearing Vermouth’s words,

“I understand the theory…but is such a thing really possible?”

“It’s already possible. That’s why that large weapon is giving off electromagnetic power and moving.”

Vermouth continued.

“The Hybrid Electromagnetic Tactical Class weapon ‘Yatsukahagi’–I think that’s the official name. It’s funny, isn’t it? The ones who gave that name isn’t those guys, but the government.”

“What’s going on?”

“My team found a few formal words ‘plans’ on that blueprint–do you think those guys now will write it down?”

Before Marie could answer, Vermouth sarcastically noted,

“–‘A Research Agreement on the Clockwork Year 985, March 25th regarding the research on a hybrid electromagnetic tactical class weapon’–the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Minister and Defense Ministers signed that agreement. Isn’t it funny!?”

Nobody could laugh.

Marie’s face appeared completely frozen, and Vermouth said to her,

“…Well, in other words, that big thing’s power source probably isn’t any different from the others. It’s a spring generator that uses gravity and converts it to energy, though I don’t know the total number in there…”

“–1033.”

Naoto confirmed.

“It sounds weird, but there’s no doubt it’s the sound of springs. Also, those guys seem to be ‘recharging’.”

Marie and Vermouth’s eyes got sharper.

Naoto never noticed them as he frowned and continued,

“I guess the initial light, and that forbidden…whatever, electric pulse? Anyway, that depleted all its power. I don’t know why, but it’s continuing to replenish almost 10% of its power, and at the same time, it’s recharging steadily. Until it regains full mobility again–from when I heard it in Akihabara, there was 71 hours, 32 minutes and 12 seconds. It’s been 5 hours since then…so about 66 and a half hours. Until then, it can’t move.”

Upon hearing that, Vermouth widened his eyes.

“Hey brat, did you have a look at the blueprint–no, even that can’t explain this. Who the hell are you?”

Marie ignored this obvious question, and pressed on,

“–So you’re saying that the weapon can only stay there during this 66 hours and 30 minutes? Unable to move? Are you sure?”

She questioned, and Naoto shook his head,

“I don’t understand anything about electromagnetism at all. If they give up on a lot of armaments and allocated the power too, maybe it’ll get moving before then. Just to add on, I don’t know what’s the 10% power used for, so maybe it’ll recover faster if it stops depleting–but this isn’t the problem.”

“What do you mean…is there still something?”

Marie frowned in surprise, and Vermouth said,

“It’s Checkmate, and they want to ‘begin recharging again’. Do you still not understand, you naive Princess?”

“–!”

Marie raised her eyebrows as she turned around, and Vermouth sneered, telling her,

“This is no longer a terrorist act–it’s a ‘coup d’etat’. They’re waiting for the government to break and self-destruct, and then–they’ll come up with something.”

Marie immediately understood.

She was speechless, remained blank as she widened her emerald eyes in shock.

Linking all the prior clues together, there was only one conclusion.

That was–a chokehold.

Of course, that was the reason why Vermouth called it a ‘checkmate’.

A terrorist act? It was not something that obvious. As the term ‘Checkmate implied’, the enemy had an ace that could topple the country. The little stunt Marie and the others did far paled in comparison.

One had to wonder how much time, how much obsession, how much of that limitless malice did the forces of Mie–no, the old Shiga forces, were able to come up with this strategy, and considering that–

It was to be expected that Marie and the others would be crushed when the enemy simply moved.

–Now that we’ve realized this, think of what you can do now, Marie.

The enemy was at the center of the Multigrid Tokyo, and shoved a knife into the throat.

Grid Akihabara was magnetized, and the bypass they worked so hard to set up could not be used.

And just as they had planned, the Cabinet was caught in an awkward situation.

As for what they should do later, Naoto and the others did not understand.

However, the government would certainly head down the path of self-destruction. To make matters worse, as long as news of that weapon reached the other countries, it would result in the worst possible situation of of the ISS interfering to discuss military intervention due to security reasons.

And if they decided to fire the God's Staff, 'Tall Wand'–the anti-Earth satellite cannon, Tokyo itself would vanish from this planet.

No, even if they did not do anything, it was only a matter of time.

She thought of the best case and worst case scenarios that could occur.

The best would be–their plan succeeded, and they usurped the power of this country.

For them, so well-versed in electromagnetism, perhaps Akihabara could be demagnetised and be the same as before. The price however would be that the entire world would view this country as dangerous, and a subduing war would be a moment's away.

The worst case scenario–would be the military intervention of the other countries in Tokyo.

It was likely that they would deal with this situation in the fastest manner possible. However, that would imply the destruction of Tokyo, and affect the region around East Asia, resulting in a global scale world.

Though I'm guessing that this theory is rather out there–Marie mocked herself.

…If the situation is going to end up like this, what can we do right now?

But more importantly, they lost two fighting forces in RyuZU and Halter, while AnchoR remained in an unusual state of being unable to battle.

No, even if all members were gathered, what could they do?

The government was on the brink of self-destruction, and the massive weapon was already a threat to the global situation. Surely it would be deemed as a threat by the major powers in the world, no?

In such a situation, what could a few self-proclaimed terrorists–do?

There was only one answer…nothing, at all.

The moment Marie got this conclusion.

Naoto suddenly stood up with an extremely grim look, saying,

“Hey, Anchor, let’s go out.”

“…Go out?”

The young girl automata tilted her little head in confusion.

“Yeah, AnchoR, you weren’t able to do anything over the 1000 years because of that shitty limiter, isn’t it? Let’s check out all kinds of things.”

“…Wah–”

AnchoR’s smile widened as she grabbed Naoto’s outstretched hand.

Marie’s narrowed her eyes, speechless as she watched them.

“Is your heart and nerves made of some super alloy or something? Do you still have the luxury to go out shopping when you’re a wanted terrorist?”

She noted sarcastically, but once she met Naoto in the eyes, she felt suffocated.

It was not a manner of speech, for her heart was certainly griped.

Naoto’s eyes remained undaunted, having discarded her who had determined that ‘nothing could be done’.

“It’s obvious.”

And with a will able to reignite the hope in Marie, who had all but given up, Naoto noted adamantly,

“Let’s do what we can do”–and so,

AnchoR tugged at Naoto’s sleeves.

She fidgeted as though she was fawning, saying,

“…I want, an order.”

“Right right, anything will do~! What exactly~?”

Naoto nodded, giving a leery smile without any hesitation,

AnchoR continued to beam as she pointed at the convenience stores just two stores away.

“…Can I, have a look…at that shop?”

“Any shop will do! I’ll buy you the entire shop no matter what it is, as long as you want it!”

“Hey, Naoto.”

Marie looked completely exhausted to sigh, and seeing this, she asked with a weary look.

“Mind telling me what are you doing right now?”

“Doing what I have to do now!”

Naoto’s grey eyes were glittering as he said,

“AnchoR has a lot of things she wants to do, but can’t do, so NOW I’m gonna fulfill them with my hands–! What else other than that?”

Marie did not answer.

All she showed was a hollow, dry smile, looking up at the sky as the sun blared upon them.

“…The weather’s fine. Speaking of which, I remember there’s an ice cream shop. How about we go check it out before Tokyo sinks…”

She muttered to herself in devastation, clearly feeling as though she had seen through everything.

They were in the shopping street of Grid Ueno–the Grid above the Grid Akihabara they escaped from.

The arcade signboard had the old words ‘Ameya Alley’ written on it.

One would feel that what happened the previous night was just a nightmare, as this place was bustling.

It was an ordinary day, but there were people passing through.

The streets were filled with shops boasting items that were filling out from their stands, and they were coupled with the calls from the stalls lined side by side–one would have a strange melancholy to such a scene…but it was to be expected of them.

–For there was a verbal blackout

They did not know anything about the massive weapon that appeared on this particular morning.

The collaborator who infiltrated the government did contact them, but even without his report, it was obvious that the government would come up with such a method.

On a certain day, there suddenly appeared an electromagnetic weapon that broke the International Treaty. Its aim was a coup d'etat, and it currently occupied Akihabara, Tokyo was on the brink of destruction–and so on,

There was no way such a thing could be explicitly mentioned.

The government–or rather, all those pessimistic about this situation, would probably make use of all their authority to control the reports.

–An expected action.

The situation was so dire, and the government doing anything troublesome would bring about a terrible outcome.

It was what as Naoto thought, what Vermouth had said, that the weapon was simply there so that the government knew 'it was there', delivering a fatal bomb to it.

Never mind the civilians knowing–what was worse would be that the foreign countries affiliated to
the ISS knew.

It's really ironic, Marie thought.

The one silver lining in this series of unfortunate events for the government–was that the electromagnetic pulse unleashed by that weapon nullified all equipment that could prove its existence.

And furthermore, thanks to the terrorism forewarning from Marie and Naoto in

the middle of the night, the residents of Akihabara had evacuated. It was possible to divert the attention of the people.

Upon lifting their heads, they could see the cable TV airing reports of the 'Akihabara Terrorist Incident' that happened the prior night.

"Due to the prior announcement of a terrorist act to freeze Akihabara, Grid Akihabara is currently being sealed. The government has called for people to be safe and avoid approaching and entering the danger zone. Also, the identity of the terrorist group that preluded the crime has been confirmed, and the government is currently looking at clues to find out where they are. With this regards to this matter, Chief Cabinet Secretary Ohatake–"

–So it went. Of course, Marie's whereabouts were not revealed.

Even at this point, it appeared the government had no intention to admitting that thing's existence.

Just like a bunch of fools Marie mocked.

If that weapon was to finish recharging and begin action, the news would surely spread, let alone a mere information censor. Once any greedy broadcasting studio hoping for a scoop fly in with a helicopter, it would be over.

However, if what Naoto and Vermouth said was correct, it appeared the enemy was hoping for the situation to turn out like this. The more the government tried to conceal the news of a massive weapon of destruction, once the news was leaked, the public and the other countries would feel outraged at the government–and the effect caused would be beyond that of the weapon.

As for what the government would do later on, it would be to protect themselves–

"Hmph."

Marie snorted, and through her sunglasses, looked up at the sky.

She watched the helicopter fly above her, and curled her lips.

She dared say that the people seated in there were the government officials who were preparing to escape.

“They’re escaping as victims here…I guess it’s a matter of time until the neighboring countries know of it.”

–In other words, this lively, peaceful daily life was to come to an end in a few hours.”

Surely, what would happen later was…

“…Pa–mama, I want an order.”

“Okie~dokie! Pa…no, mama will agree to anything here~”

Marie weakly lowered her shoulders.

…Seriously, what am I doing?

AnchoR called out mama, but it was not for Marie. No, Marie did not agree to this title, so that meant,

She was referring to that stupid looking Naoto, who was looking so tense in front of the Automata.

Or in other words–Naoto in ‘female clothing’.

They were going onto the streets, so there was a need for him to disguise himself.

Saying that itself was not anything much, but the process itself was a nightmare.

Conrad left Halter at the unlicensed doctor, and returned, introducing a theater person who was in charge of make-up. That person was a complete pervert.

This flashy woman, a literal anthropomorphism of the term ‘night sister’, immediately squealed the moment she entered the room and saw Naoto and Marie,

“Kyaa~! How amazing! Professor Conrad, can I really dress these kids so cutely!? I’m going all out here, you know!?”

“Yes, please go ahead.”

“Ufufu~♪ It has been a while since I dressed up a human! Time to get my arms moving♥”

–And in an instant, what happened was a nightmare that was hard to describe.

In fact, Naoto was looking a little uneasy at first, but…

He watched himself get stripped, had makeup dossed on him, a wig on, girls clothing, and she stood in front of the mirror.

“Uh…huh? Man, I guess, I———might actually be cute♥”

–He was infected by pervertedness.

Marie was engulfed in despair, and beside her, AnchoR’s eyes were dazzling.

“…Pa, pa, so cute…”

And with such a praise, Naoto awoke at that instant.

“I see–I see! Papa is cute after all~! If AnchoR says that, that means it’s God saying that that I’m cute?”

Naoto squealed as he embraced AnchoR, swirling around as he pranced and exited the theater.

Certainly he was an amazing pervert, one to be envied. In this situation, Marie hoped to be a butterfly that could forget everything and fly about without a care in the world.

“Now then♪ It’s your turn now–”

“Thanks but no thanks–!!”

Marie yelled, denying the poisonous fangs of the pervert with all her might.

If she was to leave it all to this woman, one had to wonder how she would turn out like.

She did a quick change of hairstyle, nabbed some suitable sunglasses and clothes, and finally escaped from this place with much difficulty, such that it could be said to be miraculous…

Marie shook her head to rid herself of the unpleasant memories, muttering,

“This bomb now is going to blow, and it’s going to end up becoming an East

Asian–no, an international crisis. What is he doing now, seriously…”

One had to wonder if Naoto heard Marie’s grumble, as he chided her,

“We got no choice here. Nobody will go crazy over anything they don’t know. I did think of this back when I was in Kyoto, so I guess that’s how it is for being normal, right?”

“I’m talking about you–you big pervert!”

While this crossdressing Naoto boldly declared that he understood, Marie impatiently lashed out,

“You do know what’s going on now, right? Be a little tense now! And also…!”

Having noticed that the crowd’s stares were increasingly gathered upon their commotion, Marie hurriedly hushed her voice.

Yet her rage could not be suppressed, as with a grim face, she glared at Naoto,

“Just think a little. Or do you actually have a crossdressing fetish!? You’re almost a lost cause already!”

Do what I had to do. Naoto declared.

This boy once indicated that if there was a need, he was prepared to sacrifice himself.

Ahh, at this point, Marie might just admit it. His decisiveness, lack of hesitation, activity, and determination were qualities she was still lacking. For an instant, she was the one who was moved.

However, was this all to that pervert’s activity and pervert’s judgment, to be unscrupulous, risking his identity being discovered, all to do such a thing.

A leisurely date with a young girl automata?

–If there were not so many onlookers, Marie really wanted to mount on him and beat him down.

“Pap–mama…I…want that. Is that okay?”

“Wow, such a cute automata! You have fine tastes, AnchoR~♪ If you want anything, I’ll buy it!”

But that pervert completely ignored her impulse to beat him out as he continued his date with automata. To be honest, even at this point, she wanted to drag him into an alley and smash him to death.

Suddenly, Marie had an idea, and deliberately said,

“Erm…Naoto~. While you’re being really gracious, I do remember that it was RyuZU who got all that money, right?”

Upon hearing those words, Naoto blankly tilted his head.

“So what?”

“Didn’t you say that RyuZU’s your girlfriend? Is it reasonable to use the money earned by your girlfriend on another girlfriend?”

Marie’s eyes were filled with the desire for schadenfreude.

Naoto however looked at her as though she was an idiot.

“You’re stupid. RyuZU’s my wife, and AnchoR’s my daughter. What’s wrong for a parent to spend on his kid?”

“…I understand. Well, whatever you want.”

“Well, I’ll do that without you telling me.

Marie wondered–*Seriously, what am I doing now?*

First, this shitty situation–She really felt uncomfortable at being unable to do anything.

And furthermore, she could not bring herself to enjoy such an date with a pervert under this amicable atmosphere.

Furthermore, this incorrigible pervert–

“Yo, mama! We’re leaving you behind!”

The crossdressing pervert hollered as he waved his hand–in any case, she was completely disgusted by his entire appearance.

She grudgingly answered, and suddenly noticed the side.

The boutique shop window reflected her disguised appearance.

The faint blond hair was tied in a ponytail, and she was a thin foreign girl, dressed in a translucent camisole.

Her unique emerald eyes were covered by dark colored sunglasses, unable to be seen by anyone.

And the pervert walking in front of her–the one suddenly saying this, was a pretty girl who could be mistaken for a cover model for a teenage girl oriented magazine.

'She' was dressed in blue a one-piece dress, a summer coat, and a haori, the feet wearing soft boots. 'She' had a babyface, but it was pretty, and being a NEET, her skin was 'pale'. With a wig and a hood with cat ears on it, there was no way to view 'her' as anything other as a girl…but.

This innocent girl was holding hands with a little girl more innocent than the former, probably an automata, as they walked alongside each other happily.

…Nobody would think of them as terrorists.

They merely continued forward, getting involved with the crowd, gathering the surrounding attentions on them. The stares appeared as though they were looking at something adorable.

–Argh, I just want to murder them now.♥

This foreign girl with dazzling blond hair and trendy outfit furiously gave chase, not noticing that she too was garnering some attention herself too.

The TV on the streets broadcasted the aftermath of the Akihabara Terrorist Incident.

"This boy is Naoto Miura, disguised as a student in Grid Kyoto, suspected of illegally dealing military parts and trading illegally modified Automata. Experts have stated that he is involved with the International Terrorist Organization 'Adventurer'. The suspect studied at the Tadasu no Mori High School, but the residence information might have been fabricated, and the police and military hopes for any civilian to provide relevant information–"

Shown on the screen was a photo of Naoto before his crossdressing.

Perhaps it was a photo taken from the helicopter, for Halter's face was taken as well.

And right opposite that street screen, at an open-air table of a certain famous hamburger chain, particular teenage criminal–Naoto was grinning away.

"Ehh–I'm in trouble, in trouble. Anyway, isn't that kinda like the description of a manga protagonist?"

He slurped the vanilla shake, laughing as his shoulders shivered.

Seated opposite him was Marie, her mouth stuffed with apple pie as she sarcastically answered.

"Nobody will believe that anyone who organized such a grand scale terrorist activity is 'just a high school boy'. They got to fudge it a little to make it believable at least, you know?"

"But even so, that's too much already. Anyway, what is that 'Adventurer'?"

"If I remember, it's a terrorist cell prominent in Europe. The leader is an idiot who calls himself the name of Cagliostro…but in fact, it's just a little group centered on international scams."

"Oh." Naoto answered with no interest, and curled his lips.

"And anyway, aren't you supposed to be the one on TV instead? If I think about it–'Making up an identity, attend school, be a backalley technician involved in terrorist activities', there's someone with such a character setting here."

"Don't point at me with the straw like that, you pervert!"

Marie pouted unhappily as she drank her chocolate shake.

"The man beside him is Vainney Halter, age unknown. He is a cyborg mercenary, and had a history of being involved in numerous international skirmishes, known as a professional terrorist–"

The report continued, and Marie widened her eyes.

“Eh? That one’s real though.”

“Eh? Uncle Halter is like that too? Well, I guess it’s true that he’s the bodyguard of a bomb like Marie.”

“Who’s a bomb here–but it does look like he’s famous, actually? That guy with only the head left seems to know.”

“–Also, the whereabouts of two female students who were acquainted with the suspect Naoto remains unknown, and their status is currently in the air.”

Appearing next on the screen was a blond girl, and a silver haired girl–Marie and RyuZU’s photos. Looking at how they were dressed in uniform, the photos were probably obtained from their student yearbooks.

And upon hearing that their status was ‘in the air’, Naoto gave a gaudy face.

“…The mastermind is a victim, while uncle Halter and I are now international criminals…this world is really unreasonable. Well, whatever.”

“Because our daily routines are different?”

“I don’t understand.”

Naoto frowned, and then, he asked, seemingly having thought of something.

“Anyway, you alright? Someone supposedly dead just had her photo up there, you know?”

“It’s fine. The dead ‘Marie’ definitely won’t be suspected.”

“…Why?”

Was it through the power of the Breguets? –Naoto wanted to ask, but Marie noted,

“I can guess what you’re thinking, but nope, the Breguets have abandoned me, so I can’t use that amount of power now, you know?”

She narrowed her eyes, continuing,

“I just–used my older sister’s disguise–so it’s definitely ‘impossible’ to catch me–except for my big sister.”

–Then, Marie thought.

Now that I'm exposed now, I'd rather be caught by the police or the 'military' here.

Marie tossed the emptied paper cup and packaging into the trash bin, and sighed.

She returned to Naoto and AnchoR who were waiting for her, and a question lingering in the corner of her mind appeared again.

–Now then, what will be the outcome this time..?

Amazingly—no, though it was really displeasing, as they had taken the initiative, there was no deaths amongst the civilians.

Without that announcement for a potential terrorist activity, one would have to wonder how many incidents would occur when the initial 'main cannon' and electromagnetic pulse caused the machines to malfunction, how many thousands of people would die.

In this sense, their actions were not completely meaningless.

That was the one thing she could proudly conclude–however…

In the end, she ended up causing more harm than help, helping the government conceal the news, and even accelerated the plans of the Shiga 'military'.

Such a fact was really–

"Mama…I want an order."

"–Oh, eh? What?"

Marie's thoughts were interrupted, and she lifted her head.

For some reason, AnchoR was fidgeting uncomfortably as she looked up at Marie.

"Mama…'you're crying'…I want you to order me to help."

–Crying? Me?

Marie inadvertently touched her eyes and cheeks…but she was not crying.

–Perhaps, even if they were made by 'Y's hands, an automata was still an automata after all, no? Perhaps they could not fully comprehend a human's emotional.

This caused Marie to instinctively feel relieved…relieved?

Before Marie could deal with her skepticism.

"…Mama, you're crying…asking for someone to help…that's why, I want an order."

"_"

This time, Marie was taken aback.

And then, something unknown, akin to disgust, was unable to escape, for it could not vent out.

AnchoR was such an automata–this fact remained undeniable.

Marie could understand the feeling of doting an automata, and did think that the automata was cute.cue.

But this was a matter entirely. Her mentality as a clockwork technician–could not simply view AnchoR as a simple machine.

Automata were not humans, just like how Marie was not an automata.

In that case, would it be strange to hope for an automata to behave like an automata–no, that would be common sense.

So, this disgust was created because the hidden feelings within her were yet to be revealed.

"…Can AnchoR help?"

No. It was weird. Impossible.

Marie had never seen an automata with such a reaction.

It was strange to view this gloomy automata in front of her as a machine.

"…Erm…then, AnchoR–can you 'destroy" that?"

–I shouldn't think too much.

Marie heard a braking somewhere inside her heart as she raised an order the automata requested.

AnchoR again confirmed,

"…Can that help you out, mama/"

"Ye-yeah, once that thing breaks down, things will be changed."

Right–since AnchoR was willing to help, that would be for the best.

The situation would improve if they were to destroy that massive weapon. At the very least, those people would be unable to get away with what they wanted.

And then–Marie pondered. *We're the ones who announced a terrorist act beforehand.*

If they were to settle this as a simple terrorist attack and be suppressed by the government–going by this script, the situation would be a little more tenurable.

But because of this thinking, AnchoR–gave an innocent smile that caused Marie to be completely speechless.

"Then, papa will help you, mama…so don't cry, mama, okay?"

–What is she saying?

She heard those word she could not understand, and could not help but look for Naoto–

"…Wha–hey, Nao–wh-what happened you you?"

She refrained from screaming that name as she sprinted off.

Right in front of her was a pale looking Naoto, sprawled on the ground, panting furious.

"…Ah–Marie. Don't mind, see if you can, get some headache meds…or some anesthetic that won't knock me out?"

Naoto was sweating profusely as Marie dashed towards him.

At this moment, Marie–finally realized it.

“Wai…t a second…what happened to your earphones?”

“–What are you saying, marie? Of course it broke in Akihabara.”

Well, of course. He did toss it aside before her, but that was not what she was saying–

“If you have time to spend money on an automata, buy something for yourself! Seriously, are you an idiot!?”

–In fact, Marie did not know what was the world Naoto heard, how it appeared to him.

But even an ordinary person like Marie could hear with her ears the abnormal sounds from the Grid below them–Akihabara.

There was no way Naoto could not hear it.

No, it might be the same in Kyoto or Akihabara. Back then, Naoto was wearing the completely soundproof headphones when they had conversations, so with his headphones removed–would this world not be too loud? Furthermore, in this situation…

However, Naoto’s face remained contorted as he curled his lips, shaking his head.

“I don’t need it now…if I buy it, I don’t have the confidence that I won’t wear it?”

“Pull yourself together! This isn’t the time for stupid talk! Do you know how sick you look now? It’s like you’ll die at any moment now!”

“Ah–don’t say that now, Marie. You’re tempting me, and that’s–really something I can’t hold myself from.”

–*Tempting?*

Marie felt skeptical at Naoto’s words, and then, she got her answer from his eyes.

The grey eyes, shivering in pain, were the most powerful answers.

–If he was to relax, he would think of impaling a screwdriver into his head for release–that was what those eyes were saying.

“Please…I’ll buy it as soon as I can without you saying, once I get ‘what I need’, that is. Anyway, just get me some painkillers, ‘kay?”

Marie was intimidated by those words, and inadvertently nodded, but–

"I-I know…but–what are you 'looking for'?"

A drugstore–if I remember correctly, there should be one right around the corner.

Marie wondered as she looked around, and Naoto feebly, weakly–

But his eyes were a contrast to Marie's–whose expression was described by AnchoR to be 'on the verge of crying'–filled with an violent will

His reply caused Marie to widen her eyes.

"What else…find a 'chance to win'! I wanna beat those guys who did such a thing to RyuZU–"

"…Papa, you're ordering me to pat you?"

"Oh~ good good! Papa will be fine as long as you pat papa, AnchoR!"

Naoto ignored Marie's protests, and devoured the painkillers–an entire box of them, playing around with AnchoR as he beamed.

Marie was a little concerned before this.

Naoto's face was writhing all the time, only stopping whenever he interacted with AnchoR. Marie had assumed it was caused by the burn, but she had forgotten about something, and understood it.

He probably was in so much pain, he could not be bothered with his burn wound.

"…"

She lowered her head. She found herself to be laughable.

In other words, Naoto–had been doing what he said all this time.

All he did was to 'do what he could do'.

Unlike her, who could only imagine and dither…

Naoto kept patting AnchoR on the head, lifting his head as he said to Marie,

“…Marie, just to be sure, Grid Akihabara is one of the parts that form the Multi Grid Tokyo, so we can’t destroy it all at one go, right?”

“Right. System-wise, it’s not impossible, but it’ll affect the entire capital.”

Clocktowers controlled the city functions of this grid–and a Core Tower controlled those clocktowers.

And the place where this Core Tower was situated, was the country’s Horological Core Tower.

Commonly known as the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

Unlike a core tower that reached deep into the underground, it was a huge pillar reaching high into the skies, as its name implied.

“It’s easy to think of Tokyo as a clock, for example.”

If the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, placed in the center, was assumed as a pendulum core, the surrounding Grid cities could be viewed as balancers, balance wheels, levels, regulators, and all kinds of escapements.

These grid cities sap the power of the ‘Equator Spring’ coming from the underground, and distribute it to all the grids in Japan–in other words, it was a unified ‘Main Movement’.

“If Grid Akihabara is to collapse, the capital circle may collapse completely–that’ll involve the entire Japan, and in the worst case scenario, destroy the whole of East Asia. That’s how influential it is.”

In that case–Naoto chuckled.

“But on the other hand, even if Akihabara does stop, the ‘neighboring grids’ can still influence Akihabara, right? –Ah–papa’s recovered thanks to you, AnchoR!”

“…Really? You still look like you’re hurting, papa…”

“This pain isn’t much if it’s for the sake of my wife and daughter–now then, back to where we were, okay?”

Naoto then gave an invincible looking sneer, declaring,

“We’ll just heat up Grid Akihabara or burn it all, along with that weapon.”

“–…”

Marie was speechless, unable to say anything.

The bypass used for their fake terrorist announcement was magnetized, unable to be used.

In fact, it was not as simple as what Naoto had said. While Akihabara was magnetized and unable to function, there was no way to control grid akihabara’s city functions–but–

“Even if one of the grids stop functioning, the neighboring grids will assist and maintain–right? If it’s able to maintain–it’ll also break off the maintaining function, right?”

–In other words, this boy was planning to fulfill what he declared.

–All he thought of was to throw that gang of people into the fire.

Having realized this, Marie asked, seemingly half dazed,

“…So you found something?”

“Not yet. I found a few bypasses, but it doesn’t look like Grid Ueno itself can provide much influence. It’s probably like you said, Marie, that the Multiple Grid is a string with numerous control functions linked together, helping each other..but–”

He stated adamantly,

“As long as I get…something definite–!”

He was giving a violent, twisted smile, due to his pain and anger, saying,

“I won’t put on these headphones, until I beat those shitheads up until their snot comes up.”

And then, he showed a change in attitude.

He gave a leisurely smile, a stark difference from before, let AnchoR piggyback on him, and stood up.

“And it’s important to look for what AnchoR wants! Got to make up for 1,000 years of absence, so how can I keep AnchoR waiting! Come on, AnchoR, where are we going to next! See some clothes? But your clothes now are cute too! Papa’s happy!”

But AnchoR, resting on Naoto’s back, whispered to Naoto, saying,

“But…papa, mama asked me if I can destroy that…”

Upon hearing that, Naoto immediately gave Marie a displeased look,

“Marie! You said such things!?”

“Y-yeah…it’ll be easier to destroy–”

That would be much faster than heating up the surrounding grids–

Right when Marie was about to continue on, Naoto cut her off,

“I object! I absolutely object! What are you treating AnchoR as, you landmine of a girl!?”

–*What else?* Marie wondered.

Her spirit as a technician insisted that AnchoR was an automata, an embodiment of violence that was unreasonable and irrational, a ‘weapon’ that should be used at such moments–

But before Marie could say this, Naoto continued,

“…Eh, assuming that AnchoR’s in perfect state, that trash down there that’s not even a B grade art form can be chopped up and left for the trash collectors to handle–maybe. AnchoR’s strong–but–”

“…Erm…sorry…”

“You don’t have to apologize, AnchoR! You don’t have to hear anything stupid from this landmine of a girl.”

“Tha–”

Marie refuted without a second thought, and Naoto narrowed his eyes at her.

“I did say that AnchoR needs to recharge, right? For example, if AnchoR now is to switch to her output rate when she fought RyuZU, that’ll be 12, you know? A few

seconds will–ah, but we're talking about AnchoR's perspective, you know? Anyway, she'll end up at 1 in a few seconds–her current activation mode. Even for AnchoR, do you think she'll be able to destroy that ginormous trash in such a short time?"

"…This…"

"AnchoR needs to recover until she can operate at maximum output for a while, gain some kinetic power from the 'Perpetual Gear' and store them, so let's see…"

Naoto stopped, and pricked his ears.

"–About 160 hours, and by that, the enemy would have regained power…better forget about your selfish wish to rely on AnchoR–and! More importantly!"

Naoto gave a condescending look, saying,

"You let a young kid handle everything, and celebrate the ending–isn't that too idealistic? Do you have any dignity at all? To be honest, I'm ashamed of you."

"–!"

Gak–Marie felt the blood in her boiling, and she trembled,

Humiliation, shame; neither of these words were enough to describe the feeling scorching her head.

However, AnchoR indicated hesitantly,

"…But papa…the 'other method'–"

"Nope, that's no different from nothing here. I refuse, absolutely, no way, I won't allow this!!"

"…Uu, erm…"

With Naoto's thorough objection, all AnchoR could do was to remain silent.

–What are those two saying?

Marie again felt distant, and got annoyed. This logic she did not know, this correct answer that was decided without her knowing–because of these factors, she felt an indescribable displeasure.

"…Sorry."

From Naoto's head, AnchoR lowered her head to Marie.

Marie felt the shock from those words in her heart, and Naoto noted bluntly,

"Woah, Marie…you managed to disappoint a girl who has been disappointed for 1000 years. I see that you're finally reached the state of a sadist now, aren't you?"

"I-I'm not–I don't have that intention–"

"…Sorry, mama."

"I told you not to call me that–ahh, I wasn't talking about that! Okay! I get it! It's my fault, sorry! Don't show that face now–!"

–Marie no longer knew what she was saying.

She lamented, but could not come up with any ideas.

And surely, how naive a thinking it was to so selfishly entrust everything for a little child to settle.

During this time, despite sweating so profusely–Naoto was gathering all the information he could hear with his ears, trying his best to break this deadlock.

On a closer though–ever since that electromagnetic pulse, this boy never stopped for a single moment.

So, Marie Bell Breguet,

What do you plan to do?

"__"

Marie gritted her teeth, almost gnashing it.

She was always like this, it was habitual. She really–hated herself.

How many times, hours, days, years do I have to spend hesitating before I learn…!

"–Naoto."

"Yes yes, wassup?"

"Sorry, I'll be heading back first. Can I leave this guy to you, AnchoR?"

"…If it's mama's orders–"

“It’s not an order. It’s a ‘request’. This guy–I’ll leave Naoto to you. If the police or the ‘military’ finds you, shake them off with all your might and return to base.”

Marie did not realize.

At this moment, this instance, for the first time–she spoke to AnchoR, treating her as an ‘ally’, and not as an ‘automata’–AnchoR was the only one to realize.

“…Yes, a request? It’s more absolutely than an order.

AnchoR gave a blooming smile, and Marie nodded back.

Naoto did not ask where she was going.

And Marie did not inform Naoto of what she wanted to do.

Halter and Vermouth’s heads ceased functions due to the electromagnetic pulse, and at this point, they were finally running.

That was simply it.

All she could do was to go on without hesitation, to do ‘what she could do’–‘what she had to do’.

Marie turned her back and could not be seen, and only then did AnchoR say,

“Mama’s not crying anymore…you’re amazing, papa.”

“…That girl’s really amazing, AnchoR.”

Naoto showed a vague smile, stating cryptically.

“She’s a genius.”

“…Genius?”

“Yep, it means a really~amazing~ person.”

“…More amazing, than amazing?”

Upon seeing AnchoR cuddle the doll and widen her eyes, Naoto strode off, looking satiated.

“Right! Don’t say that I said it!”

His strides were faster, and soon, he was jogging.

“She’ll start brooding over ridiculous stuff–but she’ll show off her genius when it’s time for them. She’s different from someone like me.”

Naoto felt that geniuses have their own troubles.

But in any case, seeing someone amazing like her so frustrated over something unimportant, to put it politely, was still infuriating.

In any case, those that were so stupidly smart were really like idiots, no?

“Well, looks like she’s recovered, so let’s do what we can do! Okay, we’re going somewhere a little far now. Let’s run!”

“..Ok.”

AnchoR, piggybacking on Naoto’s back, started to think,

–Papa’s amazing, and he says that mama’s more amazing than amazing.

With these two, and sister around, everyone won’t die, everyone will be saved, and will smile.

Such a hope she was not permitted to have over these thousand years caused her to smile,

–……

“…Papa, I want an order.”

“Uh, erm…let’s think, ah…yeah, there’s a little, sp-sports shop there…”

Saying that–

“D-do you mind…buying some water, and an oxygen canister?”

Naoto, devoid of any dignity as a father–

Collapsed onto the floor due to weakness, and could only watch AnchoR run off…

“–I’m sorry, Prime Minister…but what did you just say?”

The Defense Minister represented everyone else as he asked with a trembling

voice.

The meaningless, ineffectual Diet Meeting lasted from the previous night till this point.

And having gathered up and dismissed the meetings over and over again, during this fifth meeting–the declaration from the Prime Minister–representative of the ruling party, caused every single member present to show shock and fear that could not be hidden.

However, in the face of such reactions, the Prime Minister looked displeased as he shook his head, saying,

“It is as I have said. I have dialled the ISS hotline to explain our situation, and then–”

He took a deep breath, stating firmly,

“I made an emergency request to use the ‘Tall Wand’ on Grid Akihabara.”

There was nary a commotion in the Diet.

All those present were unable to say anything, as silence engulfed the scene.

And right behind the Prime Minister who proudly lifted his head, the Chief Cabinet Secretary seemed to have swallowed a bitter pill as he tersely explained everyone else.

“The information censor is going to be at its limit, and it is only a matter of time until every country knows. Once they do, they will soon propose that we use the ‘Tall Wand’, but no matter which country proposed it, it’ll bring about dispute from the East Asian countries, and there’s a chance it’ll trigger a war.”

…They knew at.

Or at the very least, everyone except for the Prime Minister–everyone else probably realized this grim fact, regardless of their principles and philosophies.

It was the Committee’s objective to think of what to do, and at the same time, the reason why they had differing opinions and no conclusions to their debates, no–?

While everyone else remained speechless, “However”, the Chief Cabinet Secretary continued,

“If our country is to report this scandal and ask for assistance, the situation will differ. We have disclosed all our objectives clearly, to destroy the entire grid along with it. Right now, the ‘military’ stationed in the neighboring countries and the ‘Meister Guild’ are rushing here as fast as possible. In order to minimize the damage caused by the destruction of Grid Akihabara, and also avoid a war with the neighboring countries, this is the best decision–the Prime Minister’s decision”

The Chief Cabinet Secretary concluded.

And that implied tone of terror added at the end seemed to indicate his true thoughts on this matter.

Having heard the explanation of the Chief Cabinet Secretary, all those present had the same thought.

That probably was a miraculous instance of all attendees having a common agreement.

And that was–‘what the hell are you talking about’.

If that was a joke, it was a bad one–but if that was not a joke, that would be worse.

The Defense Minister was the first to recover from the chaos, and growled in rapid fire fashion,

“–Prime Minister! Are you still sane? I have countless objections to it, but–it’s tame to call your arbitrary actions as overstepping your authority!”

But the Prime Minister–

“–This is a dire situation.”

Nonchalantly commented in the face of such lashings.

And then, he continued on confidently to the crowd that remained speechless,

“As the Prime Minister, I declare this country to be in a state of emergency!

Everyone, the country is now is a crisis of survival. We have no time to wait for the 'Yatsukahagi' to start moving again!"

(He's pulling off this move now…! That damned bastard…!)

And while the room was filled with growls and buzz, Karasawa was in a corner of the room, shivering due to a chill up his spine.

–*We have one hell of a stupid bastard here.*

He was not referring to the Prime Minister; the latter was merely a fool not worth mentioning.

Karasawa was confident that there was one huge stupid bastard manipulating that imbecile from behind the scenes.

It would be fine if the imbecile was dolled up to look smart, but that bastard hypnotized the imbecile into thinking he was smart.

Basically, that was it,

–Even if he is to watch the situation unfold, you might be forced to gorge yourself in the end. In that case, you are to declare to the people and the other countries 'I'm an honest Prime Minister', and once the crisis is over, you'll push all the blame to the rulers of the prior era who ruled for a long time, and you can escape responsibility–

That bastard probably conceived such a lie to fool the imbecile.

And to be honest, did they really think the 'Tall Wand' was something to be used that easily? That it could be deployed like a pizza delivery 'understood, we'll deliver it to you in 30 minutes'?

–That was a weapon of mass destruction, the strongest anti-Earth weapon based on the theories of the old era.

It was a metallic rod dropping down from the observation platform of satellite

orbit, and had a simple design.

There was no record of any actual use–but it was said the destructive power could easily crush a city.

There was a need to go through the ISS voting to use it, and at the minimum, three quarters of the members had to agree.

However, there were 7 current member countries–and it would be difficult to execute.

One would be skeptical as to whether that imbecile even knew what kind of weapon the 'Tall Wand' was, and it was impossible to have a miraculous diplomacy to allow the firing in such a short time.

In that case–right,

(This was a script planned long ago…!)

"–Yes! This is a state of emergency…! Prime Minister, the country will be destroyed if authority is left to an incompetent fool like you!"

The Defense Minister's veins were throbbing as he roared.

And the Prime Minister, so humiliated by that, invariably yelled back with furor,

"Know your place, young Tokita! Who do you think I–"

"Quiet! I've no intention to talk things out with a traitor. As the Defense Minister, I'm stripping you of all ruling power in this time of domestic crisis!"

The Defense Minister hollered with burning rage, and declared,

"From now on, us 'military' will seize temporary control! At the same time, we shall sue you for inciting internal conflict and colluding with outside parties!"

"Wh-what are you saying–!"

The Prime Minister–now the ex, yelled in shock.

And instead, the Defense Minister laid out a thick stack of papers, bellowing,

'You! You knew that weapon existed, and yet you remained silent! You wanted to use that weapon to consolidate your political base, and the proof is here! You saw that the plan failed, and immediately contacted the other countries to avoid

authority, your intent causing great harm to our country! This is a traitorous act!”

“Wh-What nonsense are you spouting! What are you insinuating now?”

“Behold! I have obtained proof–show it to him!”

The moment the Defense Minister shouted this, the large screen on the wall began to broadcast a visual.

–The image shown was in a certain dark room.

And in the middle of it, an old man wearing an old military uniform was seated there.

That old man, whose expression could not be seen, calmly noted,

“My apologies, Mr Prime Minister–but I do say that you are underestimating us, using us as your stalking horse. Since you have degraded us as revolutionists, we shall use your blood as the price. We will repel your government with hatred and malice.”

This brief visual ended, and the meeting room was filled with hatred and vengeful noises.

Amongst them, the Defense Minister gleefully noted,

“–Ex Prime Minister, this is what Security has found in your terminal, ‘A Crime Announcement’. You think of yourself as an honest Prime Minister even after hiding such a thing? How ridiculous!”

“No–this has nothing to do with me! I don’t know!”

“Shut up! If you want to argue, we’ll let you explain in the investigation room–take him away!”

Two military officers appeared behind the Defense Minister, and flanked the ex-Prime Minister, grabbing him, and whisking him away from the meeting.

But in the meantime, an official blocked their way.

“Pardon me, Defense Minister! I do want to ask you about something! It is about

the fact that the ‘military’ had received orders to prepare for battle 2 weeks back! Apparently, there was a blind spot in the capital defense assignments, and I suppose that is the cause for the announcement to Akihabara terrorist incident, you know? No, is there anyone else other than the Tokyo ‘military’ technicians who has the expertise and knowledge to activate such an announcement?”

“Wh-what are you implying now?”

“I see that this is just you directing your way to usurping power!”

“What nonsense are you saying! Even if you are humiliating me, there has to be a limit to that!!”

“So then, please answer my question–!”

…The meeting was in complete chaos, beyond any hope of salvaging.

Before anyone realized it, even the Prime Minister, who was to be taken away, was amongst them, and the whole group was kicking up a fuss. No matter how they insisted, it was a rehash of their own views.

(There’s no doubt about it now. Someone’s definitely pulling the strings from behind…!)

Karasawa groaned at a place slightly away from the buzzing meeting room.

This entire incident was pulled off way too flawlessly.

This coup d’etat, the Prime Minister’s arbitrary actions, the reveal and chaos, they were all too perfect.

It was no longer just a question of the Cabinet collapsing anymore. The factions in the country would break apart, including the ‘military’, and it was a matter of time until there was internal conflict.

(Is that the correspondence of the old Shiga ‘military’ Professor Marie mentioned…? No–)

Amongst this entire sequence of incidents, the Akihabara terrorist incident was probably the only thing not in the mastermind’s plans.

Karasawa too heard of this unprecedented, skeptical miracle from Marie.

But at this point, even that miracle was used ‘as one of the scenarios’.

(This monster’s able to capitalize on the ‘magic’ Professor Marie and the others used–)

Was that really the old Shiga ‘military’?

…Something seemed to be amiss.

Karasawa had a look at the chaotic meeting for a while–and then, he begrudging affirmed something.

–Looks like I’m the only one able to think normally now.

Was it due to them losing their composure due to the dire situation? Or was it their real selves as representatives elected by the people.

As a citizen, Karasawa hoped that it was the form, and he decided,

It appeared he had to do his own investigations…though it was really perilous.

(Guess I got no choice as an advisor–no, this obviously isn’t part of my job.)

Karasawa shook his head, grimacing.

At the same time, his sharp eyes noticed someone.

There was a suspicious man who was far from the crowd like Karasawa was, about to slip from the meeting.

(Alright, time to show me your true colors…!)

Karasawa curled his lips into a little smirk, and with bated breath, tailed the man…

Even as the sun sun, Tokyo remained awake.

The underground streets remained empty in the door, and filled with energising human voices and neon gear lights.

Naoto and AnchoR edged through the crowd, returning to base.

Vermouth, still hanging on the hanger, greeted them cheerily,

“Yo brat–eh, now that’s strange? What’s with that cute getup of yours? How’s it

like below your skirt now? Show me. I'm worried you might get ogled by a few old man with ill intentions."

"Like you, uncle?"

"I'm not willing, but I'm an older sister now–how about it, brat?"

Vermouth cackled, and tilted his head skeptically.

Ever since Naoto entered the room, he had been eyeing the work desk in the workshop.

Looking over, he saw the back of Marie, repairing RyuZU, who was heavily damaged.

"…How long has it been since Marie started work?"

It had been 7 hours since Naoto and AnchoR broke away from Marie.

And during this time, Naoto and AnchoR went through Grid Ueno, and then Grid Sakuradamon–but there was no way RyuZU could have been cooled down by the time Marie returned.

"Yeah." Vermouth nodded, and answered with a wry smile.

"I know what you're thinking–4 hours. She's been like that for the past 4 hours."

"–…"

"Of course, she wasn't slacking before then. She first cut off the spare parts to prepare first, and waited until the body cooled–so she's been like that."

While Naoto and Vermouth had their conversation, Marie never turned her head around.

It was likely–no, surely, she did not realize that Naoto and AnchoR had returned.

"It's ridiculous, isn't it? Is this the ability of a human of flesh and blood?"

–Ridiculous, yes, it was.

That was something Naoto once heard–the enigmatic scene he saw in the Core Tower of tower.

What could be considered a miraculous art, the apex of all arts in the world.

–The air seemed to be ruffling.

The rules of the world appeared to be contorted, centered on the petite blond girl.

The screws, cylinders, wires, springs, gears–all the clockwork parts–

Were dancing at godspeed as though gravity was thrown out of the window, returning back with the precision of a time rewinding.

The tuned materials, honed nerves, adjusted unit.

All of it was–so beautiful. Naoto could have cried accidentally given how beautiful it was.

The girl's breathing, blood flow, and even the friction of her bones and muscles formed a god-like symphony in unison.

Is this really a living human–Naoto was skeptical.

This is a human music box capable to creating with supreme skills, right?–

While Naoto was faced with this otherworldly work that made him wonder, AnchoR suddenly asked,

"Papa–is this…a 'genius'?"

"–Ah, yeah, that's right…damn it."

Naoto nodded as he answered AnchoR's question, gritting his teeth regrettably.

He merely felt moved back then, found it so pretty he was envious.

The techniques, describable as violent–were 'talents' that could practically change the world.

However, he was not simply mesmerized; he was envious, and yearning.

It would not have mattered if it was another Automata or the Core Tower. But…

That person, the one repairing RyuZU, why, isn't it me–

The melody was suddenly distorted.

“–phwah! I’m out of sugar! Chocolate, chocolate–ah, found it…phew…uu…? Oh, Naoto. You’re back?”

Marie thought of breathing normally, rolled on the floor, and laid down.

She took out a bar of chocolate, and began to chew on it, lifting her head once she sensed Naoto’s presence.

And Naoto, who did not seem to be in the best of conditions, nodded lightly.

“Yeah…I’m back–”

“…Mama, I’m back.”

“Yup, welcome back–did you find ‘what you want’?”

?”

Marie asked, having realized that Naoto’s black hair had some headphones on.

Naoto nodded, and then, looked a little skeptical, asking,

“Yeah…anyway, can I ask something first, Marie?”

“What? Ah, I can hear you out as I work, you know?”

“Yeah. Please do that.”

Marie nodded, and returned to the desk. She was not as focused as she was before–but she was repairing at a superhuman rate, asking,

“So, your question is?”

“…Marie, how are you fixing RyuZU? The spare parts RyuZU can use can’t be bought on the market, right?”

Marie did not stop in any manner as she answered Naoto’s question,

“I can handle everything except for that illogical ‘Imaginary Gear’. You know, RyuZU was kept under the custody of my old family–the Breguets. I wanted to get her to move before, so I removed and reassembled her so many times–even without a blueprint, I do remember the positions of the nanogears.”

Naoto remained silent, and Marie turned her eyes to the surrounding floor.

If one was to follow her stare, he would find dissected automata corpses lying everywhere.

“Luckily there’s a whole lot of them–these high quality automata that were used for shitty means…let’s see, how many did I break up?”

Marie answered, and Vermouth answered,

“27 of them.”

“Ah, yeah. I broke up 27 units to get their parts, and at the very least, I got all the necessary parts needed.”

“Missy, be a little discreet. That old man called Conrad is now a crying wreck, and he’s giving that end of the world look, you know?”

“I don’t care what that evil being is thinking.”

Marie muttered with a serious face, and seemed to have thought of something as she turned to Naoto.

She pointed the screwdriver bit at Naoto, saying,

“I’ll be blunt–I don’t have those convenient ears of yours. All I can do is basically some emergency repairs using the equipment here. You’ll have to do the final adjustments here.”

Though it sounded like a dig, Naoto gently nodded, and turned her eyes aside.

Marie was a little skeptical at the response, and continued working..

“Ah, what about uncle Halter?”

“–I can’t get his prosthetics, so he’ll have to wait.”

That’s a lie. Marie muttered.

No, it was a fact that she could not obtain prosthetics, but she did try connecting him to a voice installation.

–However, there was no response.

She was not certain of his status. In fact, even if the proper procedure was carried

out, a head transplant bore a great risk, and furthermore, in that situation, it was not strange for there to be internal dama–

Marie shook her head, changing the topic.

“What about you? Can’t you help out now? I want 3 self-regulated resonance movements.

“–Sorry, I don’t know how to do that.”

“Then the circuit’s fine too. Help me–”

“I can’t do that either. I don’t understand what you’re doing now, Marie.”

Saying that, Naoto went to a corner of the room to sit.

And Marie impatiently lashed out at Naoto.

“Seriously…you should have studied how to form circuits in Middle School at least, right? Why don’t you understand that? Don’t you find it a waste to throw all that school fee into the gutter?”

And with Marie saying that, Naoto raised his tone unhappily,

“Hey, Marie, I don’t understand what you’re saying at all! Don’t underestimate a mechanical nerd! I read the textbooks until they’re all torn, and I don’t know how much of my money did I use to buy guide books–so many that I can’t remember!!”

“The problem is that you, don’t, remember–! Stop sounding so proud there!”

Marie invariably growled tersely, and clicked her tongue.

“Seriously! You have such convenient ears, so why don’t you know…”

If I have that kind of a supernatural sense–Marie wondered about this so many times.

If it was her, she would use that talent to the fullest, not wasting a single second.

But while Marie gave that begrudging glare, Naoto retorted,

“Why exactly? I find it strange too. No matter how many textbooks or guidebooks I buy to read–I can’t understand them!”

"I'll slap you if you brag about that so proudly! Ahh, I really mourn over that precious paper resource…"

Marie sighed, suffering a migraine, probably due to her blood gush.

She chomped on a piece of chocolate, and then–she suddenly had a doubt.

…Why not?

She was not faulting him. It was a simple question.

Anyone else aside, **there was no way this guy didn't work hard for it–**

This idiot was such a fanatic of machines–so much that he really fell in love with a robot girl, and proposed to her.

It was understandable if it was just an ordinary topic. This guy was thoroughly uninterested in anything that did not interest him.

But machines–the subject of technical proficiency, he probably did attend class seriously.

Did he give up because he did not understand?

–How is that possible? I can't imagine this guy 'giving up'. Even him saying the words 'I don't know' is strange in itself.

Marie was confident that she had such an understanding of the boy.

In that case, though he had such determination and grit, and such talent, why did he not understand–?

His learning capability was not bad in any sense. His limbs were not clumsy.

To be honest, even if he did have a thorough grasp of the internal construct, was he able to repair RyuZU with that alone–?

And while harboring such a doubt, Marie muttered,

"–Didn't you repair RyuZU? How did you do it back then?"

"Search."

Naoto curtly replied, and Marie blankly repeated that answer.

"…You searched your way through?"

"I don't understand the theory and the textbook, so I tried everything from here and there, until the sound was nice.

–How preposterous.

Does this guy know how complex of an automata RyuZU is?

–He probably knew. Given his talent, he understands it better than me.

–I can't think of anything. There has to be some really big misunderstanding this guy has…no.

In an instant, Marie felt some indescribable notion, something akin to a chill, scaling through her head.

–Maybe it's you, who think you know, that has something really–

"–…"

Marie stopped thinking. **She felt that she could not think any further.**

"…I really don't understand this idiot at all."

Marie spat those words to cut off her thoughts, and changed the topic.

"Are you done with your questions? What about that thing 'you want to find'?"

Ahh, Naoto shook his head, saying,

"Marie, that really gigantic thing–is called the 'Heaven's Pillar', right? That doesn't belong to the military, right?"

"…? Yep. That's for the Imperial Household Agency to handle."

"Imperial Household Agency? That means…oh, I see."

Naoto seemed to understand something as he nodded.

–And upon hearing those words, Vermouth seemed to realize something as he smirked, adding on,

"This country, japan, has an old tradition etched deeply into it, long before this planet was modified into the Clockwork Planet. Nobody can do anything to them.

Brat, as a Japanese, I guess you understand now, right? That realm that neither politics nor culture can encroach on–the center of the City Grid, the Core Tower, is the place most suited for the 'country's foundation' to be built on."

Naoto narrowed his eyes, muttering,

"That doesn't sound like it."

"Of course! That thing is just how it looks on the surface!"

Vermouth guffawed, and Marie skeptically asked,

"…What do you mean?"

Marie again sensed a rational only she could not understand–and then, she was suddenly panting,

"–Naoto, what are you thinking of now?"

Her voice was quivering slightly as she asked.

However, the boy receiving the question merely remained nonchalant, so direct.

His grey eyes were giving off the glint against countless enemies, his lips showing a sneer of a child plotting a prank.

And then, his words, faced with Marie's skepticism as to whether she misheard, Vermouth's laughter, and AnchoR's confusion–

He revealed what 'he wanted to find'.

"Marie, let's sum this up. We're going to occupy the 'Heaven's Pillar'–the 'Palace'."

"–So that's how it is. What do you think?"

He spent half a day thinking of 'something he wanted to find'–a chance of winning.

Naoto described his means that were not even a 'plan' as he asked that.

“Ha–hahahaha! Hey brat–little Naoto! I was right about you! You’re really interesting! You can become an outstanding scumbug–no, wait, I think you are!”

“Papa…you’re amazing–!”

Vermouth was rolling over in laughter, and AnchoR’s eyes were glittering.

Only Marie was panting, looking stunned.

“–You’re… mad. Do you know what you just said, everything?”

“I know, very well in fact–Marie, think about it.”

Naoto raised a finger.

“Who were the ones who announced their move first, them or us?”

–Us. We declared that we’ll freeze Akihabara.

“So who are the ones who were assumed to be the culprit behind all this? Them, or us?”

–Us. That’s what the news reported.

Marie felt a chill, and gasped.

“Those guys labelled us as such, so let’s put on a show as they wish! The savage Naoto Miura who is suspected to be linked to some international terrorist group, and his happy friends are–”

Naoto gave a contorted sneer unbefitting of his baby face, saying,

“‘We did it all’–if we do this now, what happens?”

It was a brief, simple, obvious ‘malice’.

Anyone could push the blame–and a convenient ‘mastermind’ was completed.

“Those guys want to continue acting, so let’s dance along with it, make it as eye-catching, so much that a massive weapon pales in comparison! Coup d’etat?

Conspiracy? Those don't exist, and nobody needs to bear responsibility. This entire incident is just some evil passing terrorists coming in to create chaos♥"

Just one move–just as those people held the government at checkmate with one move, so were those people 'checkmated'.

Upon seeing Naoto's chuckle, Marie gulped.

–In theory, it can work.

*However, **with that method**, the significance of that, this guy is…*

"We can just dump those guys into the pot. The pot is Akihabara, and the flint is the 'Heaven's Pillar'.

He said those words on the basis of understanding that.

From his eyes, Marie could clearly see his rational mind–and madness, and she finally understood.

–Naoto Miura would never get angry easily.

He might be scorned, humiliated, they were all nothing for him.

However–there was only one huge landmine Naoto Miura would never forgive.

And those people **trampled on the landmine twice.**

The first was to restrain AnchoR with the mask, and the second was to wreck RyuZU with the electromagnetic field.

Naoto woke up in Akihabara, and the reason for his extreme calmness was clear to understand.

This guy went berserk at that moment.

He was fuming, with an infinite amount of poise, aloofness, coldness.

Just like the burn. Marie thought.

As long as Naoto feels that he 'needs to do something', he 'will do it'.

One could be unscrupulous to achieve his means; saying that in itself was one

thing, but how many people really were mentally prepared to pay the full 'price'.

–Naoto Miura is terrifying.

Marie decided to admit this feeling, and affirmed.

–Naoto Miura is strong.

Marie felt that it was some meaningless thought, but she could not help but think.

–If I'm to be an enemy against him, can I win?

As long as I use all my knowledge, skills, connections…anyway, everything I have.

Marie Bell Breguet's specs were far beyond Naoto Miura.

That should be the case. But no matter what happened–she had no vision of her winning…

"Well, Missy. Just an earnest plea here. I won't ask for a luxury like military parts, but at the very least, get me in some normal, moving body, okay?"

Marie remained speechless, and she turned around upon hearing the man's earnest voice.

Right in front of her were–AnchoR with her eyes dazzling, and Vermouth, who seemed to have made up his mind.

AnchoR's master was Naoto, so perhaps it was obvious that she would abide by Naoto's wishes–but–

"Do you really want to go along with what Naoto said? **No matter whether we succeed or fail, it's Hell from now on,** you know!?"

Yes, even if things were to develop according to Naoto's plan, they would become 'evil'–**an unprecedented group of criminals.**

This man probably had no motive or reason to assist in such a thing. He was an agent hired and paid by some enterprise, had no sense of justice, no conviction, and merely acted for money, an lawful person who was similar to a criminal. He was not trusted, and should not be trusted. He should be that kind of a person.

However, Vermouth never did avert his eyes, and answered with a serious look at Marie,

“I said that it’s **interesting**–does a man need a reason other than that.”

“_”

“You don’t understand? Well, whatever, but I’m serious here.Let me think, this… might be the second time I really wanted to do something.

Marie’s interest was suddenly pricked, and she asked Vermouth,

“…Just for reference, your first time was?”

“For some stupid dream.”

Vermouth immediately answered, giving a displeased sneer.

“I failed though. And then, I was cast away in my second life like a dead man, and thanks to that brat there–”

“Ah…sorry–”

“–**I was saved**. I recalled right before I kicked the bucket–that I’m still alive.”

Vermouth did not begrudge the apologizing AnchoR, and turned to Naoto.

“And I don’t know how it happened, but when I woke up in my third life, I met this brat. I’m a madman who’ll beat up anyone I don’t like, you know? I’m ‘mesmerized’ with this guy here. How far he’ll go, what he’ll accomplish–I just want to have a good view in some special seat.”

Marie sighed.

She looked as though she could not understand those two at all as she stared at them.

AnchoR looked up at Marie, telling her,

“…Mama, are you scared? AnchoR…will protect you…”

“What are you scared of, Missy? Hurry to the backstage and put on some winning underwear there. Now’s the scene to shake your ass and begin the ‘counterattack’, you know?”

“What are you saying now, unc–no, big sister? This isn’t important; the main point is that this isn’t a counterattack.”

Upon hearing Vermouth’s taunt, Naoto corrected him, looked bewildered.

“Those guys are attacking the government, not us. Marie–”

“…What?”

While Marie continued to hesitate, Naoto showed a cheerful, innocent, childish smile, saying,

“You know, when you’re a kid…when you see those guys piling up a sand hill on the beach–don’t you have had the thought that it’ll be really fun to kick that hill down and run away?

–Marie suddenly recalled.

Back when she abandoned her identity as a Breguet and a Meister.

After stopping the forced purge on Kyoto, and declaring herself a terrorist.

“I won’t get any reward and thanks,”

Back then, on the roof, what did I say?

“But that’s definitely something–“

Marie sighed, giving a wry smile.

She reached her hair into her head, muttering,

“You guys–are really a bunch of hopeless people.”

“But it’s interesting, isn’t it?”

Naoto chuckled.

Marie felt her will being dragged along by that smile, that she was being teased, but for some strange reason, she did not feel displeased about it–and she nodded.

She understood.

–I'm an idiot too.

And so, right at this moment, this instance, and thereafter.

This childish prank of an unprecedented crime began.

Chapter 2 – 05:17 – Disaster

It was dawn.

There stood a massive, black shadow in the searing sky filled with azure and orange hue.

That was a Tower. An enormous tower that reached from the surface to the sky.

–A construct called the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

Looking down at the land, one would find that pillar piercing through a massive gear, standing tall.

It was Grid Sakuradamon, the highest town in the Multiple Grid Tokyo.

This little city was merely a few kilometers in diameter, and the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ took up a majority of the land space. Thus, there were no civilians living in the grid.

However, there were people living in within the city walls surrounding the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ at the center.

For a long time, it housed a traditional family that existed since ancient times, and the people serving them.

There was a deep ditch surrounding the walls, an independent construct that segregated it from Grid Sakuradamon.

Due to the nature of the gears, the gears in this world were destined to continue spinning. However, this place was a rare exception, one that did not move.

And atop this unmoving gear and walls.

There were colors of lush green and water hanging atop the city.

It was not artificial in any way; it was a plaza filled with true nature.

A floating garden.

There was an observatory situated by the garden, where the inside and outside of

the Grids could be seen.

–A young girl was standing there.

She was dressed in a faint pink, blouse, a hand-knitted suit, and pump shoes.

Her glossy black hair was reaching down, landing below her waist.

She might appear to be a little brat who just graduated from college and entered society, but her eyes were different.

An ordinary girl would never have such forged, firm-willed black eyes.

Those sharp eyes were staring at the ‘military’ in formation before the city.

–Currently, this ‘palace’ was surrounded.

Houko had a rough understanding of the chaos and crisis that befell this country.

And she knew very well…that she was powerless against it.

“–This really is an unpleasant situation.”

She muttered, reminding herself to pull herself together, and diverted her eyes.

She turned her left wrist, and tugged at her sleeve.

Revealed on her left wrist was a silver watch. It was simple in function, and etched on the surface was a name ‘Marie’, so tiny it was not obvious.

The time was 5.17am.

There was another 43 minutes until the ‘military’ below indicated that they would ‘break through the fortress’.

On February 8, there was a terrorist attack in Akihabara at midnight, and at dawn, an unknown massive weapon appeared.

The electromagnetic weapon caused all functions in Grid Akihabara to fail, and the ‘military’ sent to intercept it was wiped out.

The government released a declaration of emergency, stripped the Prime

Minister of his power as leader, suing him with the charges of inciting internal conflict and inviting external scourges. The Defense Minister too was under doubt–

And then, the media took the initiative to release a scoop on the massive weapon.

With that, before the people could recover from the shock of a terrorist incident, they learned that Tokyo has fallen, and in their panic, the grids started to revolt.

The police could not handle the chaos, and requested for the 'military' to be mobilized.

But a group of mostly young officers broke off from the 'military' right when the command system was in shambles.

They immediately assaulted the the garrisons in Grid Ichigaya, robbed the armory equipment, assaulted Grid Sakuradamon, and surrounded the 'Palace'.

–That would be a brief summary of the riot that would later be known as 'The 2/8 Incident'.

"–We can no longer leave this to the higher ups."

A young captain said as he sat at the negotiating table."

"The government and 'military' are not willing to put in any responsibility in the face of this national crisis. No, leaving that aside, they were pushing the blame from the moment they secretly agreed to the research of electromagnetic technology. This situation is all caused by the higher-ups. The Kyoto Incident, and then this happened–we can no longer remain silent."

That is correct. Houko thought.

The higher ups had ceased to function, and it was true that they caused this crisis.

The Captain then said,

"We have no time. The threat of the massive weapon still lingers, and the request the Prime Minister made to use the 'Tall Wand' has not been retracted. We have to hurry and seize political power, and to negotiate with the massive weapon and other countries. At the same time, we need a symbol to prove that we obtained the power–that will be you, **your Highness**."

But this is where the problem lies, Houko thought.

In a certain sense, such a reasoning was correct. Even if they did topple the government with military force, they would simply be seen as starting a rebellion if they did not recognize any actual legitimacy.

The only ones who could prove this legitimacy–no matter the ceremony–were the people of the 'Palace', like her.

However, it was not the Emperor who was lying sickly in bed, nor was it the Prince who was still an infant, and it was obvious that she–Princess Houko Hoshinomiya, who officially took over the throne for the time being, would be in charge.

However, how effective would that symbol be–?

The young captain pleaded earnestly,

"This country is already rotten. There is a need to correct! Our intrusion of your chambers is not to be excused, but Princess, please assist us for the sake of this country.

To be honest– Houko thought.

She personally empathized with them, and felt that it was true. If the era was different, or if the situation was a little different, perhaps she would have granted them the Imperial Flag.

However, reality was not as simple and sweet as assumed.

And because of that, her answer was already decided.

"–There is no meaning to that. I shall refuse."

The young Captain's face was contorted.

Houko showed an iron-willed stare at the commanders present, and informed them.

"I do advise all parties to cease with such futile actions, return to your squadrons, and maintain your stations. Your actions cannot be pardoned, but I will personally write a letter pleading for leniency, so that your crimes will be reduced."

"Your Highness! Please think through it!"

"I have. And this is the conclusion of my thoughts.

The Captain's face reddened, and he muttered, saying,

“We cannot back down now. If you are to refuse no matter what, Princess, we are mentally prepared to get what we want, even if it means by force.”

“I suppose. Do as you please, Captain.”

“…Do you think this is simply a threat?”

“No. You do have your own thoughts, but I do have my thoughts, my responsibilities. I cannot submit.”

All negotiations broke down. They had planned for many pointless negotiations thereafter–but in any case, there was no time.

6am, February 10th–that would be the time when they premeditated their ‘forced entry’.

“–Ah, Your Highness. So you are here?”

Houko heard a voice from the back, and turned around.

Standing there was a frail old man dressed in a suit.

“Mr Kusunoki.”

“You do have to know that acting alone now is dangerous.”

“It is meaningless for them to murder me. Considering their objectives, they will try to abstain from that no matter what.”

Barging into the ‘Palace’ through brute force alone was a perilous act in itself, but if any of the Royal Family was to die as a result, their actions would never, ever be legitimized.

However, the chief servant Kusunoki answered skeptically,

“Perhaps their commander might be as such…but those people driven by a moment of impulse might not be as wise as you are, Your Highness.”

Houko nodded, and had another thought.

“If everyone is wise, such a situation would never have happened, I suppose?”

“I do not know…however, if it is someone of authority like you, Your Highness–”

“Well, that will be hard to say. I am ultimately a powerless girl after all.”

Houko mocked herself, and turned to stare at the lookout.”

She watched the battalion that got into position, and muttered,

“They did that on the assumption that they are in the right.”

“Such a bunch of foolish brutes. They actually intruded upon the ‘Palace’.”

“Perhaps. However, for us to call them fools, we do not have any more capability than they do.”

Upon hearing Houko’s words, chief servant Kusunoki gasped, and asked,

“Your Highness–are you implying that they are in the right?”

“No. I did inform them during the negotiations that it is pointless. There was nothing to discuss the moment they stated a clear threat and ignited a rebellion, however–”

Houko paused, and continued,

“If I am to approve to them and give them legitimacy–what will change?”

“Your Highness, what you are saying is…”

“I am not underestimating my authority, but even if the people do accept, that is just how it looks on the country. To what extent will the other countries…the people controlling that massive weapon accept it?”

“According to the reports, they are the ‘military’ of old Shiga, and this is a coup d’etat on the government…in that case, I do not think they will belittle the Royal Family’s authority, no?”

“–Really? I do doubt that.”

Houko narrowed her eyes, muttering,

“–And speaking of reports.”

“Yes…”

“Have you heard anything of Marie Bell Breguet’s whereabouts?”

Houko asked, and this caused Kusunoki to look conflicted.

“Erm…well, she is someone who appeared to have died, and we cannot track her whereabouts down after all. I would say that I would not have remembered her name until you noticed her photo, Your Highness.”

“However, I can be sure that she’s involved in that Akihabara Terrorist Incident in some way.”

“So you mean that she has some important crux to this?”

“Actually–I do think she is the mastermind.”

Houko exerted more strength into her hand grabbing the railing.

“Even if all the technicians of the JSDF around the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ are gathered, seizing control of a city’s grid and manipulating it at will is something they cannot do. I do not think the technicians of the Capital Defense Forces can do that either. She is the only technician I know how has such expertise.”

“…I do remember that she was your classmate?”

“Just for a month.”

Her lips showed a smile, saying,

“When I studied in Europe, I was grateful for her reception. I remembered well how petite she was, yet she was brimming with passion like a fireball, filled with a sense of justice, and also the premier technician…”

Kusunoki asked in surprise,

“…Is such a person the mastermind?”

Houko shook her head,

“I do feel that terrorist activity in itself did not make sense. The coup d’etat would have succeeded regardless of that action–no, I would say that it is because of that incident that the people were able to evacuate safely, that nobody perished as a consequence.”

“Then, Your Highness, are you implying that the terrorist incident is of a different intent from this coup d’etat?”

“Yes. Of course, this is just a deduction based on ‘some vague feeling’, but assuming that it is correct…”

Houko paused,

“I cannot help but think that there is still upheavals to be had.”

Of course, that was merely an optimistic, hopeful thinking.

Reality was not as nice as imaginations. Houko knew that well.

No, she assumed that she knew–

–However, Houko did not know.

That in another 10 minutes, or to be precise, 8 minutes and 52 seconds.

Leaving Houko aside, the world would have to realize that such understanding was merely a blissful imagination.

The reality that they were still standing on that imagination.

In other words–**The reality was always overriding their imaginations.**

At the same time, on the outside.

There was a tense atmosphere filling Grid Sakuradamon.

Soon after, it would be the premeditated ‘forceful assault’.

The passion for a revolution, the agitation before a battle–and the moral dilemma for the savagery they were about to commit.

The heavy atmosphere descended upon the army surrounding the palace, and an interviewing helicopter was peering from afar.

Bitterness–an atmosphere almost everyone present felt.

“Phew…finally, some air after 48 hours, how refreshing. No, even I do not have anything like a respiratory installation. I must say though that despite my vision being filled with such foolish peasants unable to graduate from their mindsets inferior to fleas for thousands of years, this sense of pleasure is valid.”

Closing in from behind–was ‘reality’.

It was a small group of people. Walking right in front was a girl in a black dress and silver hair.

Her footsteps were fast and fleeting, seeming giving off the delight of an elegant dance at any given moment.

Coming out from those fresh blooming lips was a refreshing voice of a silver bell.

The topaz eyes were glittering, and that Automata showcased the sharp verbal jabs that were not heard for a while.

Tailing behind her is a black-haired boy and blond girl, walking at strolling pace.

Right behind them was a young girl in red and white armor..

They casually passed through the center of the road, brazenly moving forward.

The black dress girl walked as she turned to look behind–showing a smile to the boy, a smile even an angel would be smitten with, saying,

“Master Naoto–? Even if I am merely a servant of clockwork, I should have the privilege and restraint to choose who I should be serving. My head is not so wretched to bow down to a simpleton of a single-cell microbe, so please understand my displeasure.”

“Well, yeah, I know, but this is–”

One had to wonder how many times had they repeated this conversation, and the black haired boy nodded lethargically.

However, the girl looked displeased as she continued,

“I understand, Master Naoto. You wish for me to have a clear distinction from a beast who knows nothing of the word ‘etiquette’, and I shall respect your vulgar logic and obey accordingly. I shall repeat however–that I am truly unwilling.”

The boy could hear a voice that was practically hidden in the laughter of flowers, and gave a wry smile as he answered.

“Got it. **We need to go all out with this,** so just bear with it–I got a reward for you.”

“–I am an object of yours, Master Naoto. To be served with a reward…please do understand your own position.”

Contrary to her words however–only the boy was able to see–the delight from the black dress girl, and then–

“AnchoR…you ready?”

“…Yes. It’s your order, papa–no, a request, so.”

The red and white girl had her head patted by the boy, and nodded.

Finally, the blond girl gave a despondent, wry smile.

“Don’t you guys know what being nervous is…? Will it go well here?”

But contrary to her words, there was no sense of uneasiness to be felt from her words.

It seemed both the boy and the black dress girl understood this, and they beamed, saying,

“Well, Marie, there’s no way RyuZU and AnchoR will fail.”

“Master Marie, are you bored enough to actually ask such a rhetoric? Or is it that your brain of a simpleton is faulty? If Master Naoto says that he can do it, even a problem too great for God will have to back then–of course, this will depend on a certain Miss not committing a blunder and pulling him down.”

“…Well, whatever, I’m not gonna argue with that. Even your spiteful words sound so reliable now.”

And–the blond girl said,

“The enemy’s the one you should be dicing.”

Right in front of them was a barricade formed by miniature automatic weapons and vehicles.

–And in the face of the military perimeter surrounding the ‘capital’, the boy listened keenly, muttering,

“Multi-pedal heavy armor tanks, 18 units, 32 armored soldiers, light and heavy automata…I’m kinda lazy to sort them out, but there’s 68 of them. Including those passengers, there’s 98 soldiers with military prosthetics–”

The boy callously affirmed the number of forces surrounding the place, asking,

“Marie–if we’re going to wipe them out–suppress them with the strongest forces in the world, how long will it take?”

“And not cause any damage to the ‘Palace’? It’s impossible to approach it now, but let me think…”

The blond girl lowered her head to ponder.

The girl was a technician, neither a mercenary or a soldier. Thus, with her personality of a technician, she started estimating based on the capabilities–

“Assuming the many generations of armaments developed by the Breguets, the light armor automata and prosthetics given to a military force experienced in street warfare and suppression, if we send 4 of them and use them to their limit, it’ll take a minimum of 14 minutes.”

Upon hearing this answer that was based on some unbelievable premise, the boy immediately boasted,

"Now then, RyuZU, AnchoR, the time limit will be **"7 Minutes"**. That should be more than enough, right?"

"…Destroy them, all? I want an order…can I hold back…?"

"Yeah, hold back as much as you want. Don't kill anyone. That's absolute."

–If anyone else was to hear this conversation, what would they think?

Would they laugh it off? Berate them? Any way–

"Anyway, RyuZU, AnchoR–as we planned, do your best to attract their attention. I'll leave it to you."

"Understood…now then, if you excuse me."

–Speaking of which.

This year, there had been a lot of events happening in Japan that never happened before, starting with the failed purge of Kyoto.

The Akihabara Terrorism Announcement, the Akihabara Magnetized Crisis, the Kasumigaseki Meeting, the request to use the 'Tall Wand', the Tokyo uprising, the February 9th uprising, the skirmish at Sakuradamon–

Such incidents might be caused by some mastermind steering, plotting, lots of conspiracies…

–Seemingly mocking this.

It was a theater-like crime that would be summarized as **everything was committed by a mere terrorist cell.**

The final incident that would conclude and be deemed as a common name.

And the first incident–of a series of incidents that would shock the world.

This incident would later be recorded in history as the 'February 8 Uprising', or 'Second Upsilon'.

On this year, this day, this moment, this instance.

Clockwork Year 1016, February 10th, Japan Standard Time, 5.59am in the

morning–

A tower was suddenly sliced, and crumbled like a puzzle, attracting the starts of the surrounding people.

And in the sounds of the rumbling collapse, a voice akin to the music box spoke, echoing clearly,

"–Attention please♪"

A black dress girl bowed elegantly in front of the collapsing tower.

And a young red and white girl in armor bashfully mimicked the girl's actions, bowing.

"Hello, . My name is the first of the Initial-Y series, 'YourSlave' RyuZU."

"E-erm…I'm the fourth unit of the Initial-Y series 'Trishula' AnchoR…ni-nice to meet you."

–This incident started off with the greeting of two automata (legends).

"Currently, I am observing a group of arrogant, pitiful, tragic microbes hurried around by some crude plotting, so listen, it should have been a ridiculous, delightful event–but due to my Master's orders, and due to some personal matter that happened to me–if I have to be honest, what I will do next is simply **carnage**."

"E-erm…please allow me to apologize first…I'm sorry…!"

The black dress girl showed an angelic smile, reaching out two black scythes from deep within her skirt.

And the young red and white girl regretfully drew out massive swords from the solid gears that appeared out of nowhere.

Anyone who heard their introductions–would have doubted their understandings.

However, the black dress girl appeared not to be concerned with such

understanding and doubt, maintaining her smile–

“I do not find this impudent, and I am truly unwilling to etch this on those regrettably pitiful, incapable minds, but I do wish that all those who had the fortune of hearing our names and our voices–”

She paused,

“Will **taste this along with the dust**, and kneel down to exalt us♪”

“So-sorry….!”

–And then, anyone who heard such words were not even allowed to know who they were, let alone resist.

Even if the armored units were to fire off one shut, they would be haplessly crushed and groveled, powerless again this irrationality.

–This day proved the existence of the newest legends, overriding that of the old legends.

Those living on this ‘Clockwork Planet’ had to recall.

Think of where they were standing.

And that was–the so-called reality was always trampling, overriding their imaginations, moving forward.

There was no ‘truth’ in history’, only ‘explanations’…or so someone said.

In any case, this applied even for witnesses to historic events. For example–

Captain Sumitada Hikoshima of the Tokyo ‘military’ Central Intelligence Branch, 28 years old.

He was a young commander, the fastest to rise to this rank.

And the Central Intelligence Branch he belonged to was in charge of dealing with ‘military’ mission information, to assist the other squads in strategy.

This time, the ‘Akihabara Terrorist Incident’ occurred, and an unknown massive weapon appeared,

“–This is a farce, a farce, a farce! Because of this incident, that Okada…!”

Hikoshima angrily slammed his fist onto the table, shaking the simple, cramped commander tent.

His furious uproar too caused the other officers, present at this tent, to gasp.

Lieutenant Okada was his friend, of the same year, part of the **Capital Defense Force**. He went out to take on the massive weapon…and died in battle.

The command system was erratic, reports conflicting, and Captain Hikoshima, an upstart amongst the younger generation, was driven by the motivation to take revenge for his friend–and then…he learned of the ‘military’ secret.

30 years ago, Grid Shiga was purged; the government discreetly agreed to the research on electromagnetic technology. At this moment, they were trying to manipulate this incident into causing this incident.

–In other words, my friend was killed by the politicians…!

He felt that it was unforgivable, that he should not leave this to the higher ups.

The higher ups were still embroiled in their internal strife, pushing the blame onto each other–he could no longer hope in the higher ups of the ‘military’ anymore, and immediately contacted his peers, whom he could trust.

The young commanders, his peers, were all upstarts as well, and they were friends who had an oath of sake to devote their utmost for this country.

Captain Hikoshima’s fury of justice was burning like fire, stoking the flames in the other officers.

And as a result, there was a rebellion–no, a ‘coup d’etat’.

At first, he was supposed to wait on the response of the Princess as a symbol of their power, and it was disappointing–but his allies did advice it was inevitable that a person like her would have conservative ideas.

Captain Hikoshima also understood very well that seizing political power through military force–was in no way a right thing to be done. He was not justice.

–But with the country in a crisis, the situation was critical. Sometimes, he would

have to do things even if it meant subverting justice. Why would she not understand…

As he thought about the real intent of that weapon–and the higher ups simply wasting their time, it was no different from slow suicide. There was a need to collate all authority and fighting strength.

But…why attack the 'Palace'?

This is too ridiculous–Captain Hikoshima thought, and shook his head.

(Even if I have to pull all the stops, the end makes up for the means! …But, that's–)

It was simply some futile internal strife. In fact, they had no time and ability to divert so much military force on such a thing. They had to settle this quickly.

The moment of the assault was approaching, and right when Captain Hikoshima was about to shout–at that moment…

An explosion rang.

It was not the only one, for several echoed thereafter.

"What's going on!? Which idiot started off first–!?"

Those anxious forces started attacking now Having determined this, Captain Hikoshima clicked his tongue.

–This is bad. Even with a premediated declaration, there would be problems in the future if someone started an attack before the command was given.

No, there's already a huge problem already when some fool started attacking.

"The 7th squad got wiped out! It looks like they were assaulted by the enemy from behind!"

"…What, did you say?"

However, the report from the intel soldier caused the Captain to widen his eyes..

"The automatic cannons on the right wing were destroyed!"

“We lost contact with the second armor forces! 3rd and 4th–no response either!”

“–Impossible. Who are the enemies! Which forces are attacking now!?”

The Captain growled at the communications officer, pondering,

The military higher-ups? Those incompetent fellows were playing kemari with each other, pushing responsibility around.

The mobile police? Impossible. They were already lacking in ability to maintain order, and did not have such capabilities.

The public special forces? Impossible. Their numbers were insufficient in dealing with a ‘military’ force of such scale.

In that case–were they the ‘Palace Guards’? Captain Hikoshima clicked his tongue.

The Palace Guards were the military technicians in charge of managing the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, and typically, their fighting strength was apparently low.

However, they were the forces in charge of defending the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’–*Did we underestimate them?*

Maybe they’re using the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’–the Palace, some secret passage underground or something to attack.

Do we finish this quick and easy, and attack from the front while the forces are split?

It’s different from what we planned, but if we can minimize the damage to the palace as much as we can–

“Report on the enemy forces!”

The commander turned to shout, but–

“–Why, how daring of you to actually command me, Mister. It is your free will to not treasure your life, but I do advise you to repent if you assume you have authority over me and annoy me–”

Answering him was a girl’s clear voice–followed by silence.

The crew was sprawled all over the tables, and the massive equipment that were in operation just a while ago was reduced to scrap.

What–when did this happen?

The canvas was sliced and flapping in the wind; one could see the scenery outside.

The Captain's swimming eyes saw the quad-pedal tanks 'Komainu' installed right behind the simple commander tent–severed into oblivion.

Standing on that debris was a girl in black dress.

The girl poked two scythes from beneath her skirt, smiling leisurely.

…

"……Huh?"

Captain Hikoshima's eyes lost all luster as he blurted out in skepticism.

–It was as though there was a demonstration of something really inexplicable.

"Woah…well, I guess you're the commander here?"

Captain Hikoshima turned around, and saw a blond girl, seemingly passing by, peek into the tent.

"I understand your feelings though…just think of it as being caught in some natural disaster, okay? Sorry about that."

The girl seemed to completely empathize with him, and she closed an eye, drawing a cross before her chest.

At this moment, Captain Hikoshima finally gathered all his courage to ask of the intruders' identities with a trembling voice.

"…Who–are you guys?"

"–Well, to put it nicely, if I have to introduce myself, it'll be really troublesome…I left a comms estation for you, so mind broadcasting this to the entire military for me? It'll save time."

At that moment, an explosion rang.

This time, the roof of the tent was blown up, and at the same time, 3 tanks surrounding them were sliced haplessly.

Causing such a bewildering tragedy–was a young girl in red and white armor, and she suddenly noticed Hikoshima.

“Ah, eh…hello, I’m…AnchoR”

“I’m the older sister RyuZU–of the Initial Y series. My apologies for your futility. Have a nice day.”

Hikoshima witnessed the gang who went off while leaving these words behind.

Captain Sumitada Hikoshima was one of the historical witnesses.

If one was to put his viewpoint into words, how would it be like?

Illogical, unreasonable, brief, abrupt–his revolution, done out of righteous fury, **failed without any reason**.

Battle? Incident? No–this phenomenon could only be considered as an ‘incident’.

Defining this truth in itself was not the job of a witness–but a historian.

–This scene was like a joke.

It was not a battle; just a one-sided sweep.

It was not a calamity; this irrational phenomenon was with a purpose.

In other words, it was just trampling–the strong trumping over the weak.

“…I knew already…but this is really illogical.”

“This is normal for both RyuZU and AnchoR.”

While Marie pitied the young Captain who appeared to be the captain of this operation, Naoto proudly answered.

Both of them nonchalantly passed the road across the moat protecting the palace, chatting away.

At that moment, the lightly armed automata, which had their weapons aimed at the duo, were instantly crushed.

Immediately afterwards–no, at that instant, an automatic cannon several hundred meters away was similarly destroyed.

It was likely that both were–done in by RyuZU.

Marie could not be certain, since she could not see RyuZU and ANchoR in action.

RyuZU continued to move at high speeds, dismantling all the malice directed at Naoto.

In other words, the devastation done nearby were probably by RyuZU, so for Naoto–

"…Ah, waah…kick…!"

Her voice was a little panicky. Based on deduction, she probably swung the sword, and when unable to respond to a back attack in time, kicked at it–probably. That 'kick' she did while trying to hold back as much as she could–

"Hey Naoto…that 'Komainu' weighs 3.4 tonnes, you know?"

"Heh~ that's unexpectedly heavy."

"Yeah…very heavy. That thing's **flying in the air**…it's funny, isn't it?"

That 3.4 ton metal block flew in the air, and Marie could not help but let out a dry laugh at that sight.

–The C&S 228 quadra pedal tank, commonly known as the 'Komainu'.

It was a four legged tank developed together by two of the biggest companies in the country, the 'Seiko' and the 'Citizen'; while they were inferior to the 5 Great Enterprises, the Breguets, Vachrons, Audemars, Pateks, Langes, they did have some of the premier technology in the world.

The main unit the 'military' had was probably the 'A-Un'–perhaps they could not deploy the latest 'military' armaments in time because of the sudden coup d'etat.

However–the 'Komainu' was still an **outstanding unit** that was yet to be phased out.

And even Marie, as a technician, was impressed by the design.

It was a manned vehicle, and had all-view vision and inertia absorption system, but it displayed combat mobility comparable to that of a heavily-armed automata, and could move upright through the use of cables. By deliberately abandoning the thrust of the automatic springs and switching to the stored energy function, it was able to deliver a considerable power output over a large surface area.

Notably, its load–it contained the basic armaments of a 120cm cannon, a 30cm Gatling cannon, and could contain another 4 weapons at most. They could even be switched around in battle–but–

“Ah…sorry, papa, mama.”

AnchoR suddenly appeared in front of Naoto and Marie, as though she teleported, and casually swung a hand.

Immediately–there was an explosion in the sky, and after a beat, Marie understood the situation.

–There were two missiles closing in on the duro, and they were easily deflected by AnchoR”s gauntlets far into the air.

Marie turned around, and saw the ‘Komainus’ firing–far away in the distance. The machine was sliced vertically in half, and while the pilot remained speechless, AnchoR did not bother to bow at him.

Having witnessed this, all Marie could do was to give a dry smile.

Certainly, the country’s ‘military’ armaments were not weak in any sense.

For a country that focused mainly on producing local products, its armaments were considered the premier in the world.

But all of that–ended up like this.

“…Hey Naoto, this is really reality, right? Mind pinching me?”

“Okay–hey, why are you beating me up!”

“Seriously, there has to be a limit to how unreasonable this is…”

“Ow…now that’s what I want to say…damn it.”

Having witnessed this maelstrom of a violence, Marie finally understood.

RyuZU was not being humble when she declared herself to be the weakest of the ‘Initial-Y series’.

“…RyuZU is supposed to be the ‘weakest’, and she’s shredding the weapons like paper mache. I should pay attention to this more…”

Recalling back calmly, RyuZU did shred the Vacherons’ latest weaponss ‘Grat’ easily. Having considered that, the massive weapon was an abnormality to be able to block her scythes, and the normal weapons would typically end up like this–this was an illogical logic.

Furthermore…there was the capabilities of AnchoR, dubbed the ’embodiment of the strongest’–

Marie watched AnchoR swing a massive sword to cleave three ‘Komainu’.

“…Hey, Naoto. What kind of combat was ‘Y’ planning for when he gave that kid such powerful fighting strength? –I guess even aliens will go running away after seeing that, right?”

Marie asked with a lethargic voice, and Naoto gave a dumbfounded look, answering,

“Well, it’s to make them run with their tails tucked behind them, right? You really ask too much unnecessary stuff, Marie.”

–And then, at that moment,

“Got it, Marie.”

Naoto, who had his earphones off the entire time, raised his voice,

“That’s the heavy armed automata Type Cz 35C ‘Black Tortoise’–yep, no doubt about it. I found it.”

–Certainly, there was no doubt that it would be fine for them to simply enter the palace just like that.

But that alone was not enough.

They had to crush all the military forces before the enemy retreated.

Based on ‘Naoto’s plan’, they had to do so in an illogical, overwhelming, unreasonable manner–

They had to crush the scene such that even the strongest military forces in the world could nto do so.

–And one more thing.

“Okay, time for the next plan…!”

Marie cupped her head with both hands, seemingly bracing herself as she curled her lips.

She looked up at the sky–seeing numerous media helicopters whirling in the air, boldly getting their scoops on the maelstrom of destruction. Once she saw that one of them had the cameras aimed on them.

She raised her left hand, and swung it hard.

There was a temporary JSDF command post set up in the Palace’s meeting room.

The posh furniture were all taken away, and installed with communications devices and a huge screen.

And the JSDF, still in a somber mood till a while back, was watching the TV visuals on the screen along with the terrified Palace staff.

“–E-everyone, have a look at this unbelievable scene…!”

The reporter’s voice was raised, most likely out of disbelief.

Well, it was to be expected, for it really was unbelievable.

The ‘military’ forces that was surrounding the Palace in the visual just a while back was crushed by ‘a certain something’ they could not comprehend–

“Their identities are unknown! B-but one of them is–ah, it’s that boy! He’s the suspect, Naoto Miura, who declared that he would freeze Akihabara just days ago! Also, according the survivors’ witnesses, there’s also two automata who called themselves the ‘Initial-Y’ units–!”

The young black-haired girl–Houko stared at the screen, and murmured,

"What…is this?"

A young JSDF technical officer answered,

"I-I don't know…there's no way any weapon can do such a thing…"

"Is this really realtime visual? Is it possible that it's doctored?"

While the Princess cautiously asked, the officer immediately answered–

"I suppose not. This does seem to be a live telecast from a public channel. Also, 'nobody' has the time, technology, or even the motive to create such a fake image."

–Of course. To whose benefit will it be to air such a thing? The important thing is that it is happening right under our noses. Anything that can be seen from the palace cannot be bluffed.

"So that means that it is an actual broadcast, no?"

In response to Houko's affirming words, the officer nodded despite being unable to say anything.

–This is**reality**.

It was something even Houko forgot–something that trampled over imagination.

She felt intimidated, and turned her eyes to look at the screen–before noticing something.

While the reporter was introducing the boy called Naoto Miura…right beside him was a blond girl looking up at the camera.

The girl's emerald eyes were glittering as she raised her left hand up high, swinging it.

"–…"

Houko could not help but turn her left hand around.

She had a silver watch, with the name 'MARIE' inscribed on the case.

"W-we have an anonymous report! …Huh? Ah, sorry, the-they're–"

The report thereafter left Houko flabbergasted.

Only she realized that it was a magic spell used to solve everything.

“They are the criminal group who declared the terrorist incident on Grid Akihabara, and created the now running unknown weapon running rampant there…!”

“Fuu…hhaa! Can’t calm down without this after all.”

–The location was one of the buildings flanking the road to the palace.

A girl was looking down from the roof, staring at the frantic scenes, smoking while wearing a rubber suit.

To be precise, she was not a woman, and more technically, she was not human–neither a cyborg, nor an automata.

It was a man whose head was forcibly attached to an automata unit–and someone called his name.

“Vermouth, Naoto found it. The ‘target’s said to be at your 2 o’clock, in one of the 5 units.”

Marie’s voice came from the resonance communicator installed in the mechanical body, notifying him.

He/she leisurely stood up, stretching the arms out, grinning.

“All right, as expected of the little brat I’m in love with. I’ll fuck him in the ass as a reward.”

“–Homosexuality is contagious. That’s what he said.”

Vermouth showed a wry grinned, and continued running down the roof–jumping. He continued to move to the designated place, and Marie asked nervously, hiding her disdained,

“–It’s kinda late to ask this now…but you’re really alright with this?”

Well, this certainly is kinda late–Vermouth chuckled quietly.

“What now? Even you don’t believe in the body you built? Aren’t you just a little bit–”

“Of course I believe in it! I did my best in the adjustments–but that machine isn’t a cyborg body. Understand what I mean? That’s not for human control!”

“–Are you kidding me! You’re shocking me with something I don’t know! In that case, Missy, tell me something. Who’s the one who attached my head to this thing in the first place?”

Vermouth continued to leap off the buildings as he remained spiteful, and Marie was speechless.

–There was no need to mention it, for it was Marie herself who did it. But–

“Relax. This body’s fine with me, you know? You came up with the best work here, Missy.”

It was not a lie. In fact, he was leaping off buildings, and yet there was no impairment to the shock absorbers.

As expected of a love automata, it was sexy and pretty, so much that one could think of a movie star or a top model. Amazingly and luckily for him, the difference felt between this model and Vermouth’s prior prosthetics was kept to the minimum possible. Though the power was inferior from the original high-grade military parts used, but as it was built for dancing, it was able to do flexible movements his original body could not do.

–Right, it was well done, so well done that **he could not feel any delay in his reactions**.

Even after using so many of the quality parts, nobody could actually make such amazing adjustments.

Truly, this is the work of a genius–Vermouth thought, but did not say it now.

“Well, this thing is a playdoll automata, but there’s actually one big cock at my crotch–”

“I’ll kill you, you know?”

Vermouth’s teasing taunt was met with a frigid response.

“No no no. I’m serious. Why did you put that on me?”

“Like hell I know! It was there already! I don’t want to touch such a filthy thing either!”

Vermouth widened his eyes, seemingly able to see Marie’s blushing face,

“–Hey, you’re kidding, that’s **standard equipment**? I heard of the rumors, but this is Cool Japan’s regulations? Awesome; no matter the era, Japan’s always living in the future!”

Vermouth cheerfully smirked, but he felt something strange through his communicator–and his attitude changed as a result.

He lit a new cigarette, calmly telling Marie,

“–Want a smoke? It’s nice.”

“That body–even your original body won’t be able to pick out that smell”

Upon hearing Marie question ‘what’s the point of that’, Vermouth merely grimaced. She did not understand.

He continued to jump from one building to another, identifying the target–as that brat had said, there was a squadron of 5 units at his 2 o’clock. He saw the ‘target’ amongst them.

“For example, Missy, even a body of flesh and blood will say that the air’s great, but what does that mean?”

“…”

“Air itself has no smell, right? The idea of great air is just a **good atmosphere**–that’s all.”

–The heavyarms automata, Type Cz-35C ‘Black Tortoise’.

Built by Seiko, its unique characteristic was a fusion of thick alloy armor and heavy firepower–its arms were equipped with 40 cal cannons, the shoulders equipped with the main cannons–the Thermobaric Busters, and they were equipped with highly intricate Ai. They were amongst the strongest bipedal unmanned weapons in the city.

…They mobilized such a thing for a mere young Captain’s rebellion, and one had to grimace at that.

However, it seemed that they were unable to get enough, so accompanying it was

3 armored ‘Metal Demons’ units and a quadra pedal ‘Komainu’.

Right below him were numerous cyborg foot soldiers and lightly armed automata.

Vermouth looked down at this squad, and thought of ‘Naoto’s request’.

Let’s repeat that again. Don’t kill anyone. Just destroy the ‘Black Tortoise AI’, ***eliminate all other units****.*

Is there all that is to the order? Do I add in some fries and drinks to this too?

Vermouth held in his grin. *That brat Naoto came up with such an impossible problem for a scumbag like me*.

“And then…right now, I feel that tobacco is the **best taste**.”

–“Nobody else other than you can do this”–

“…so in the end, what was that?”

Marie gave a skeptical question, and Vermouth then leaped off the roof–

He jumped at the 6-storey building opposite him, did a triangle jump down the gaps between the building, and landed.

If you don’t like something, beat them up–he thought of Naoto’s eyes when the latter declared this, exhaled a large puff of smoke, and then beamed, appearing as though he would bite the smoke off.

“–It means that since I have a good smoke, I won’t miss!”

Vermouth smirked, and then charged into the chaotic battlefield from behind the building.

Charging towards a cyborg foot soldier who was on his guard.

Of course, he was spotted.

“Wh-who’s that–”

The cyborg soldier skeptically raised their rifles as he saw this playdoll automata

charging in abruptly.

Vermouth immediately closed in on them.

And as he did, he kicked.

The toes kicked the rifle body, and the rifle left the hands of the cyborg.

Vermouth grabbed the rifle that fell out, and then fired a shot, shooting through the cyborg's right leg.

And in a blink, he fired another 3 shots at the flank of the stunned cyborg.

Vermouth watched the enemy tumble back, and showed a smile, saying,

"How do I look like to you? I want to know to."

There were 4 shots fired, and this triggered the reactions of the other cyborg soldiers, shouting,

"–it's the enemy!"

"Ah–good. It's easy for me when they think of everything as an 'enemy', even if it's some erotic love doll passing by."

Vermouth guffawed as he was fired upon by the enemy in three directions. However, he did not stop.

Vermouth continued to dodge the hail of bullets with such nifty dance-like footwork.

He ducked into the blind spots of the enemy cyborg foot soldiers and automata, sometimes using them as shields for them to shoot themselves at, and continued to glide around.

They were rifles, but a single shot would be fatal on this playdoll automata– Vermouth continued to sprint however, not showing any fear, only a cynical sneer instead.

And then–

"Lend me your head, kid."

Vermouth stomped on a cyborg's head, and leapt.

Right in front of him was an armored soldier–the ‘Metal Demon’.

Vermouth was on the shoulder of the enemy soldier–and it landed about 8m higher, scaling another enemy unit. Such mobility was inferior to a military cyborg, but it far surpassed the capabilities of a human.

Due to the chaotic battlefield, and having lost its enemy, the ‘Metal Demon’ Vermouth was on was looking around, acting wary.

–However, it could not find anyone.

Vermouth knew very well that as long as he remained hidden in this position, he would not be discovered by the 8 cameras on this ‘Metal Demon’.

And he continued to cling onto the extendable arms of the ‘Metal Demon’, opened the hatch that was basically at the back of a human’s neck, and turned the emergency lever to the right.

The ‘Metal Demon’ then stopped. The reverberating sounds of the gears and the cylinders rang, and the pilot hatch suddenly opened like a backpack.

Seated inside was a young man who appeared to have just graduated from officer school.

“…Huh?”

The soldier stared at at Vermouth blankly, and the latter pointed his gun at the soldier’s nose, saying,

“Yo kid, nice driving.Speaking of which, I’m kinda shocked that this is a single-pilot, ya’ know?”

Vermouth steadied his gun with one hand, and stuffed the cigarette in his other hand at the pilot’s mouth.

And then, he grabbed the startled soldier by the head, forcing him to nod.

“I’m exchanging this cigarette for this baby here. Aren’t we friends? Tell me how does it feel to fly in the air later.”

Vermouth prattled on as he pulled the pilot’s lever.

And then–with an explosion, the pilot seat was fired off, and the pilot screamed as he flew into the sky.

“Thank you.”

Vermouth gave a sexy kiss to the pilot, and dug into the pilot seat.

“Now then~–let’s show everyone that I’m a scumbag worthy of that little slut (Naoto)’s expectations.”

Part of the functions was lost because the pilot seat was gone. However, the cockpit was not gone, unlike a fighter jet.

Vermmouth grabbed the severed cables and joystick–that alone allowed him to manipulate the ‘Metal Demon’ system.

If she actually saw his true capabilities–what kind of face would Marie show?

Vermouth pondered as he prepared himself for the next ‘strategy’.

At the same time, he saw the flustered armored units and quadra pedal tanks, sneering,

(Ha–we got some rookies who aren’t any different from amateurs here. They don’t know how to identify any enemy units?)

Despite the armored unit ‘Metal Demon’ being stolen, the enemy did not fight back.

None of them could determine the stolen ‘Metal Demon’ as an enemy and use their weapons, to prevent friendly fire.

Also, the ‘Black Tortoise’ and other automata could not determine enemies on their own.

The only condition when this would change–would be when they were attacked twice.

To put it another way, nobody could shoot at the ‘Metal Demon’ commandeered by Vermouth, except for the foot soldiers’ rifles, until Vermouth shot twice.

In that case, what should he do?

–First, he had to destroy the quadra pedal ‘Komainu’.

Given the armor of the ‘Black Demon’, and in such a state–it would be over if he

was targeted.

In that case–

If he could not destroy the ‘Komainu’ in one hit, the Gatling cannons of the ‘Black Tortoise’ would puncture the ‘Black Demon’ the moment he fired a second time. But even so, if he was to take down the ‘Black Tortoise’ in the first hit, if the ‘Komainu’ pilot was to change the enemy detection settings and return to the battlefield–it would really be checkmate.

Then first, he would shoot the ‘Komainu’ down to immobilize it, and then seal the ‘Black Tortoise’.

After that, he would have to finish off the two ‘Black Demon’s before the inevitable concentrated fire.

All that–without killing anyone.

Talk is easy–but it was the toughest mission he had till this point.

However, Vermouth completed his strategy in less than a second, and showed a sneer unbefitting a playdoll automata, thinking,

–This is really, really interesting.

Vermouth kicked the cockpit floor, saying,

“Hey useless scrap–do you know code D3?”

Of course, there was no response.

Now that the pilot seat was fired, the system determined that the unit was ‘unmanned’.

But assuming that there was even a reaction, the system would answer ‘negative’. Besides, that was the command code Vermouth named himself.

“You don’t know? Well, I guess. How about this trick that ghost Princess taught me?”

Having said that, Vermouth started playing with the cables he held with both hands.

The other hands were attached to cylinders that were controlling the ‘Metal Demon’s power output.

Before the operation began, the instruction Marie gave was–

“All limiter out–thrust yourself for my sake, you hear me, you virgin?”

And seemingly in response, the lights of the remaining display glowed.

Shown right in front was a countdown indicating the remaining power output, ‘162 seconds’.

“Ha–only 2 and a half minutes for your first time? Don’t be shy, you quick shooter–I’ll show of some technique that’ll make all Missies cum in 2 minutes–!”

The throbbing machine caused Vermouth to yell agitatedly.

And coming from the resonance communicator was Marie’s disdainful voice,

“…Are you sick with some dirty jokes syndrome or something?”

“Huh? Well, you heard me, Bitch Princess–isn’t that hardboiled?”

“…You serious? If you are, I’m butting in–“

“Hahaha! You’re the one who’s going to get butted in, you kno1!?”

With a callous remark, Vermouth tugged at the wires.

At that moment–the machine heated up in an instant, and the ‘Metal Demon’ began running.

The right arm of the machine grabbed a hyper-frequency blade, charging towards the planned target–the quadra pedal ‘Komainu’–

While it continued to charge at the enemy with maximum speed–Vermouth showed a wry smile.

Both AnchoR and RyuZU–those abnormal automata could easily handle these weapons, a quadra pedal tank was a ‘monster on the battlefield’, even if it was outdated.

It was suicidal to do a frontal assault with merely an armored unit.

But despite not being familiar with the design blueprint like Marie–Vermouth, a

veteran on the battlefield, was familiar with the flaws of a multi-legged pedal unit.

There were 3 weaknesses to them.

The assisting AI, the activation springs, and–the cockpit with light armor at the abdomen.

The former two were protected with sturdy armor without exceptions, and with the firepower of the 'Metal Demon', it would be insufficient to shoot through.

Thus, the best method would be to–duck below the enemy and kill the pilot.

However–Naoto's request was 'not to kill anyone'

And thus, Vermouth chose the '4th option' to eliminate it.

It was a weakness any multi-legged tank—no, any manned unit would have–if they were controlled by people, there would be a controlling bypass to be severed.

Though not as firmly armored as the former two, this part was still protected by sturdy armor.

The only thinner part was–the back waist of the machine.

Right above the pilot seat.

–He was to stab through the armor and destroy the target, and at the same time, not damage the cockpit below.

It was a laughably difficult task–

"–You're the only one able to do this."

Vermouth recalled the face the boy showed as he said this, and gave a wry smile.

He pulled the cable, and pushed the joystick down.

Vermouth exerted the thrusters to full power, and at the same time, leaped high into the air.

An activation far beyond the output limit alone caused all parts of the machine to give a malfunctioning warning.

But it did not matter.

The ‘Metal Demon’ adjusted its position in the air, and aimed at the target.

When coupled with the 14.2 ton mass of the machine, he was like a stapler.

He stabbed the blade tip of the high frequency knife into the back of the ‘Komainu’ waist–

“Shiiiiitttt–!!”

The feeling–the machine’s recoil and impact caused Vermouth to swear out loud.

“So haaarrdd you trying to fight against my cock, you shitty dog–?”

The blade was gradually contorted, but Vermouth continued to exert strength without much concern.

And again, Marie’s voice rang from the communicator.

“…I’ll tell you this. Your dirty words–make you completely opposite of being hardboiled.”

“–!?”

That line caused Vermouth gasp in shock, and he swung the hand down before jumping back.

At the same time, he felt the sensation of the blade barely stabbed inside.

And as proof, the ‘Komainu’ legs buckled immediately.

With that, it would not be able to move for a few hours, until its repair.

…But more importantly.

“Hey, wait! It’s a gentleman’s etiquette to flexibly use the words ‘Fuck, Shit, Damn, Bitch’!?”

The right arm that was swung down, exploded as a result, and the landing impact caused the feet to be abnormally affected.

And because of this sequence, all the automata determined Vermouth to be ‘someone to be reidentified as a potential enemy’–and they were staring at him.”

At his feet were the pellet toy gun-like bullets fired from the rifle–which he ignored.

"…Are you born in America? No, even those delinquent films in this era have more elegant lines than you, you know?"

Vermouth seemed to sense the realism in Marie's disdainful voice.

"–You serious!? That bastard tricked me!? I'm gonna kill that guy if I meet him in the other word."

He lashed out at his dead ally Amaretto–and was staring at the 'Black Tortoise' in front of him.

And then he thought, 'one more hit'–

If he fired another hit, he would be perforated by the cannons.

And thus, as according to plan, the second target would obviously be–the heavyarms automata 'Black Tortoise'.

Vermouth grabbed the other blade with his left hand, and accelerated immediately.

He closed in on the 'Black Tortoise', ignoring the annoying error alerts–

(–Got you–)

Suddenly, his machine shook violent.

The remaining 'Black Demon' unit tackled him, without using any weapons.

Despite not removing the enemy identifier–it could at least tackle with its body.

"This shitty thing–looks like there's another virgin that knows how to use his brain a little, hey!"

Vermouth gritted his teeth.

Despite both being 'Metal Demons', there was no way the enemy could match him in strength when he had the power output removed.

And thus, he could attack the 'Black Tortoise' directly while ignoring this enemy,

but–

It was impossible for him to 'simply' stab through the AI accurately while he was grabbed by this 'Metal Demon'–so he would have to rid himself of this enemy first.

Vermouth struggled mentally–but for a moment.

"Seriously, is that true? I'm a Napoletana through and through…right! Nationality wise–no I don't have any nationality nor memories, but that has to be the case!"

"Anyway, you're just a hoodlum born out of garbage."

Vermouth braced himself for the second hit if the situation permitted–the final hit on the 'Metal Demon'.

"Hey bitch! Apologize to all the Italians! You know, Italians are those kind of people–best in the world at racing and playing balls! Of course, that ball play includes the sport on the bed–!"

"Just go and die."

The activation spring was wrecked, and the 'Metal Demon' tumbled to its knees.

But at that moment, Vermouth felt some inorganic killing intent coming in from all directions.

Of course–that included the baby in front of him.

"–Ahh, looks like it's going as you wish."

The 'Black Tortoise' in front of him pointed the Thermobaric Buster cannons at him.

Just a little graze would have assured his doomsday, let alone a direct his.

"–Vermouth!"

Upon hearing Marie's voice, Vermouth shuddered.

"Hey bitch! I guess I'm Italian alright! That's what my soul tells me!"

–Shit! Vermouth hissed as he bared his fangs. He still had a chance.

He pulled at the cables, and let the machine step to the left.

At the next moment, the Thermobaric Buster Cannons of the ‘Black Tortoise’ punctured through the position Vermouth was at–

…I just need to get away from this guy’s firing range!

If it was the cannon of a lightly-armored automata, he could hang on for a little while.

However…

“–Even in this situation, my soul calls me for to act cool in front of a woman!”

Vermouth yelled, and instinctively took a further step left.

Just a moment later, the Gatling cannons fired at where he was.

–That was from the last ‘Metal Demon’ left behind.

“So you finally know how to identify now? But–I’m grateful here, you know?”

–He really was grateful.

Vermouth cackled as he continued to escape left along with the machine.

The enemy Gatling cannons continued to howl, and the continuous cannons pursued the ‘Metal Demon’ Vermouth was piloting.

–But Vermouth quickly got to the side of the ‘Black Tortoise’.

He took up position, hiding himself from the cannons.

The sweeping cannon hits took down the armor of the ‘Black Tortoise’, creating sparks.

And then–

“–If you want to take down something, just take down one. Did you just spend your time in lectures and no actual practice?”

The other ‘Metal Demon’ was deemed to be an enemy by the automata.

–At this point, there were ‘two’ *enemies* in all.

The ‘Black Tortoise’ AI immediately hesitated for a moment. There were two

enemies, so which should it priortize?

A moment of stillness. The time used to simulate.

However–Vermouth curled his lips.

He let the unit duck into the gap, got up the back of the enemy armor from the side, and stabbed his blade hard into the AI installation.

Sparks flew, and the tip sank deep into the armor.

“A fraction of a second’s worth of delay on the battlefield will determine life and death. Have you learned something good, virgin?”

–Certainly, it seemed to have gotten it.

This was the reason why it was said this was a job only Vermouth could do.

Theoretically, Marie too knew.

Where the AI command part was at; the precise positions of the thought system, the control system, the depth, the thinnest part of the armor, the minimum theoretical value required to destroy units.

However, Marie could not execute such theories on the battlefield.

–How much of destruction was the ‘bare minimum’, and how much destruction was ‘overkill’.

Even if the correct values could be calculated, it could not be fulfilled through ‘destruction’ alone.

Besides, it entailed controlling a massive object with a blade 2.5m long, completely differing from compartualized units.

If he was to accidentally destroy the AI along with the machine’s circuits, he would have to repair the parts.

And thus–Vermouth got conceited.

As the little slut Naoto said, I’m the only one able to do this.

For a ‘certain reason’, Vermouth did destroy hundreds of machines with similar

conceptual designs as the 'Black Tortoise'.

However, the 'Black Tortoise' appeared to have stopped moving, and it caused him firm belief.

—That the request was fulfilled, that he just needed to 'destroy the AI'.

All that remained were the 'Metal Demon' who was similarly identified as an enemy, and other small fries.

This light armored automata alone would have a tough time dealing with the 'Metal Demon'.

And in the worst case scenario, the enemy could prioritize taking down Vermouth before slowly recalibrating their enemy identification.

In contrast, because of that hit, his own unit's left arm was somewhat wrecked due to being at its limit. His blade was gone.

Even if he was to escape from the 'Metal Demon', this body had insufficient capabilities to escape the remaining soldiers.

In that case—

"There's still one more until the request is done…hey, scrap metal, remember code D3?"

He stared at the display, and there was still 60 seconds left. With that much time…it probably was enough for him.

Vermouth pulled a cable, pressed down the level below his feet, and hissed,

""Die for me'—now then, this machine's in rather good condition, but my code is to make it disposable, scrap it after I use it."

"You're terrible."

Vermouth chuckled at this response, and hopped out of the cockpit.

And then, the 'Metal Demon' Vermouth was on charged at an abnormally high speed, clamping onto the other 'Metal Demon' that was attacked by automata, restraining its actions.

On the other hand, Vermouth too was being shot at by the cyborg foot soldiers and the automata fire.

If he was hit once, this body that was for civilian use would be reduced to scrap metal.

However, Vermouth somersaulted around to dodge the enemy bullets, charging towards the destination.

And at the same time—

"—Welcome back, kid. 'As I just said', mind telling me how it feels to be in the air?"

Vermouth beamed at the shadow that was descending from the sky.

—It was the 'Metal Demon' pilot who was forcibly ejected from his cockpit.

Vermouth cleanly unravelled the parachute surrounding him, captured the pilot, and played dumb,

"That car you lent me is all spoiled, a flawed one. Return me my smoke."

Vermouth then snatched the cigarette from the pilot's mouth.

And gnawed at the cigarette again—

"Hm? Your mouth feeling lonely? Try this one for taste."

At that moment, Vermouth snatched the handgun at the pilot's waist before the latter could respond.

He then stuffed the gun nozzle into the pilot's barely opened mouth.

This just so happened to create a hostage situation, and Vermouth grinned at the surroundings.

"Now then..if you don't want this guy to have his brains blown out—even an idiot will understand now, right?"

"Umpf, umpf…!"

The now-hostage pilot flailed his limbs around, but Vermouth remained unmoved.

One of the cyborg soldiers, who had his gun aimed at them, exclaimed with scorn,

"You're despicable!"

“Hah! Despicable? If you want to tell me off, that’s weak. This is a fact.”

—Despicable. Pragmatic, emergency measures.

Yes, absolutely correct—Vermouth chuckled.

It seemed he did not care about the countless guns that were aimed at him, merely exhaling hard.

Leaving aside the cyborg soldiers, the automata could not fire when their ally was used as a shield.

And then, Vermouth counted quietly in his heart, 5, 4, 3…saying,

“…Try refining your words now, kid…phew—zero.”

At that moment—

The ‘Metal Demon’ Vermouth rode on converted its remaining thrust into heat, self-destructing.

The sound of an explosion expanded, and hot air struck.

On the other side of a bright light was the enemy ‘Metal Demon’ flank punctured through, and it collapsed.

By reducing the remaining 60 seconds worth of thrust power to 12 seconds—the power was as expected, merely destroying the flank of the ‘Metal Demon’.

Once he saw that the pilot escaped from the immobilized unit and ejected with the seat, Vermouth exhaled some smoke.

“Phew—…smoking’s great after all…mission complete—”

And then, he continued to force the gun into the hostage’s mouth.

Vermouth then showed a heinous sneer unbefitting of the alluring face.

“Try a better line next time, Japanese? For example—”

–At that instant, a black flash raced by.

All the remaining soldiers present were sliced.

The cyborg soldiers could not move, the automata could not move again, humans

and metal scraps were piled as a hill.

The girl landing on that scrap hill–RyuZU, spoke with a mocking voice,

"–Such a 'despicable', 'wretched' manner of battle. How impressive."

Upon hearing that, Vermouth gave a wry smile.

He let go of the hostage, and hit the back of the latter's head to knock him out.

"How understanding of you, Miss Automata…yes yes, call me that with such a 'pleasurable manner'."

Naoto, AnchoR and Marie too arrived, and the latter said,

"…I don't believe this. You did it–with that body…?"

This panting tone contained her own surprise–and relief.

And upon knowing of this, Vermouth felt satisfied, taking a deep breath of smoke.

He then curled his lips, saying,

"–What now, Missy? Were you bothering me over the wireless because you're worried? Have you fallen for me?"

"Go die already, you pervert. If you failed here, Halter will be in lots of trouble."

"Huh–I guess? So your real target's that big brother, huh? I'm stumped. I can't beat him."

Vermouth waved his hand, laughing it off,

He said to the back that was running off to the 'Black Tortoise',

"–Go confess to him, 'Missy'. I'll comfort you if you fail, 'bitch'."

I pulled off a miracle for you.

Now it's your turn to show me how much of a real genius you are, or a self-proclaimed genius of a bitch

Hearing the support coming from the sub-channel, Marie gave a wry smile.

That's how it is, she thought.

This man is perverted and infuriating, but it does look like he'll keep his end of the bargain.

"RyuZU, AnchoR, and–Marie, I'll leave it all to you."

In response to Naoto's voice, two pairs of feet leaped off, crossing paths.

RyuZu's scythe glided through the 'Black Tortoise' with its AI destroyed by Vermouth, cutting off the back armor.

AnchoR carried Marie to the exposed internal functions unit, and as she put the latter down–

"…Mama, do your best…!"

"I told you not to call me that."

Marie muttered, and sighed.

She put the head down, opened up her tools, opened her fists to stretch her fingers, and clench them again.

–She had to let 'Naoto's plan' succeed.

They had to crush all the enemy forces illogically, overwhelmingly, unreasonably, at a speed even the strongest forces in the world could not do.

–And another thing.

Marie continued to work on Halter's head, pondering about the previous night–

"Attached Halter's head to a heavy armor automata–are you kidding me!?"

Marie let out a harsh exclamation.

The strategy Naoto briefed them on–no, it was such a ridiculous idea one would wonder if it was a strategy. What Naoto briefed them on was a proposal on what to do with Halter's cyborg body.

The lack of the presence of the combat veteran Halter was a huge loss. Even so, it would be more perilous to use cheap cyborg parts. In that case, what we just need to do is to capture a 'military' main weapon and use it–that was what Naoto said, but…

"…Get this clear already. Don't tell me you don't know that **a human brain is used to control human body parts**! Compatibility wise, a cyborg and an automata are two completely different things!"

Marie rattled on about common sense, but Naoto just felt confused, tilting his head, saying,

"…But I guess uncle can do it?"

"–Just because Halter did pilot an armor unit before? Well, he has the experience, but that's completely different from connecting his brain to it! Have you scanned your surroundings using 'complex eyes'? Can you control 8 legs? You got to know that the intel for an artificial skin sensory is completely different from a Touch Sonar! The human brain can't handle such information."

"You're wrong there, Missy."

Vermouth, connected to the playdoll automata hanging on the rack, interrupted,

"Aren't you underestimating the brain of a veteran soldier? One so grizzled even the weapons are part of his flesh and blood?"

"…Don't be stupid. Anything else, such premises–"

"**They exist. Lots of them.**"

Marie was speechless, and Vermouth mocked her,

"By connecting the brain to a weapon, the machine won't be restrained by an AI's rigid simulations, and able to improve on the flaws of a manned unit by preventing control delays. Some were forced to do it–and some did it themselves, you know?"

Lots of them–this line implied that there were lots of such 'human experimentation' going on around the world. Marie widened her eyes, exclaiming,

"Are you kidding me!? That's a violation of human rights–completely illegal, right?"

“Haha–! Now that’s funny! Insisting on human rights on the battlefield? What Goddess would actually respect such a thing? Too bad I didn’t see it before!”

While Marie was left speechless, Vermouth sarcastically laughed, and moved his stare about.

“Anyway–brat, you’re the best maniac out there–did you figure that out while saying that?”

“Ah, I guess so? I heard that uncle’s cyborg body was a ‘prototype’, so I guess it’s likely–”

“Not bad, not bad. Your insight really is on scumbag level! I’m rather surprised that Missy doesn’t know this though.”

“…What are you guys talking about?”

Marie was skeptical because she could not follow the chain of conversation, and asked unhappily.”

Vermouth showed a spiteful sneer, answering her question.

“I did just say it right? **The one who did this himself**–was brother Halter himself.”

Upon hearing this answer, Marie felt difficulty in breathing, and muttered,

“…You’re kidding, right?”

“I’m rather surprised that you don’t know, Missy. It’s a famous legend in this circle, you know?”

The smile vanished from Vermouth’s face as he said this.

“The legendary mercenary involved in the Scarborough Fair incident. Oberon. Over Work, capable to triggering miracles in dying moments of despair. Anyone who doesn’t know of such are either outsiders or amateurs. That brother–**was in the middle of battle when he did that, you know?**”

And then–

“He captured a heavy armor automata from the enemy! And connected it! To his head!”

Vermouth sounded really proud of this.

“That brother seemed to have said it before, you know? ‘No simulation device is able to compare to a human brain that survives a battlefield’. The proof of that is that he personally shot down 27 of the same kind of heavy armor automata and lived on.”

Vermouth rattled on as though he was a fan passionately chatting about his favorite team. Upon hearing that, Marie answered him,

“…You’re lying. If such an incident actually happened, there would have been a paper on it.”

“The Scarborough Fair incident was an unofficial operation, and it happened before you were born, Missy. How about I tell you the reason why I’m surprised that the little slut Naoto figured it out and you didn’t–?”

And then–

“I’ll say, Missy. A ‘Prototype’–is in other words, an ‘experimental frame’, right?”

Upon hearing that, Marie actually gasped.

“You get it now? Normally, this is a violation of human rights–but what happens if it just so happened to be a suitable person for the job?”

…Vermouth did not appear to be lying.

To be honest–Marie did not understand why the Breguets actually hired Halter in the first place.

But in that case, it would mean that Halter was a lab rat–

Marie denied it again,

“…It’s impossible theoretically. If a military automata’s information flows into the brain–the brain will break.”

“Yep. That’s the reason why ‘such a weapon’ isn’t mass produced. One of the reasons is that there are many idiots out there who tried to be heroes and connected their brains to a weapon, went crazy, and forgot their own names.”

Vermouth chuckled.

“–Like for example, me?”

Marie stared at Vermouth in shock.

The man who lost everything except for his brain laughed.

“–I did say it before, right? I’m brother’s ‘devoted fan’.”

Marie lowered her head and went silent, pondering–before sighing.

Then, she lifted her head.

“Right, but there’s one condition.You call yourself a fan, so you know the machine Halter connected himself to back then, right?”

“The HS FK2 ‘Oberon–it’s already an old relic back then. This country hasn’t purchased it, and even if you can move it, I don’t think it’ll be useful on the battlefield, you know?”

Vermouth guessed Marie’s intent, and noted beforehand.

Marie was probably wanting to get a machine similar to when Halter succeeded to reduce the risk as much as possible…that was Vermouth’s guess.

But she stared at the air, muttering, pondering for a little while, and slowly nodded.

“–‘Oberon’, right? I see. I think I can accept it a little. This means Halter wasn’t fighting recklessly without any chances of winning.”

“Eh?”

“The ‘Oberon’–is a ‘flawed product’ that has its controls and thought system gathered at the same place. As long as it’s shot in the back, it’ll stop functioning, so there’s an added armor at the back to reinforce it. This causes the machine’s center of gravity to tilt, and to counter that, there’s an excess of weapons loaded on it. It’s a ‘bad work’ as bad as shit.”

Vermouth was speechless, and stared at Marie.

“–Hey, did you memorize the blueprint of all the weapons in the world–”

“**Did I remember?** Of course I did.”

Marie heartily answered, curling her lips into a smile.

“Don’t underestimate an ex-Meister here, Mr Dutch Wife? Now that it’s like this, maybe we’ll be able to solve this.”

“Eh, and that is?”

Naoto asked in confusion, and Marie explained,

“It’s a flaw that the control and thought systems are gathered at the same spot in the back, but there’s also the advantage of convenience in repairing it. There are a lot of weapons that have such a structure…and there is one with a similar conceptual design to the ‘Oberson’–the Type CZ-35C ‘Black Tortoise’–Naoto, can your magic ears figure out where that ‘Black Tortoise’ is in Tokyo?”

“You called it magic…like hell I know the model. At the very least, I need to hear it move–”

“–You can figure it out just by hearing it?”

Marie gave a serious look as she repeated to confirm,

“–Can you hear it?”

“Yeah. Once it moves, I’ll find it for you.”

Naoto stared at Marie right in the eyes, nodding to confirm. Marie sized up his eyes–saying ‘is that so’, and nodded. At this point, there was no time in doubting this guy.

“So, let’s set up a plan targeting it. Prepare to attach the head to that machine–Vermouth.”

This was the first time Marie called this man in front of her by his name, and she asked,

“So, answer me…what do you think are the chances of succeed?”

Halter had no reaction, and he remained unconscious even when his head was linked to a voice installation. He was in a vegetative state.

Would things go well? Would he really wake up? Right when Marie was feeling uneasy–

“Need me to tell you something good? Miss Marie Bitch Breguet?”

Vermouth showed a defiant smile,

“**A soldier** lives and dies on a battlefield. Even after becoming a Princess’ baby sitter, the warrior’s blood would never vanish. I dare say that once that big

brother smells the scent of battle–"

He paused, and then continued,

"He'll wake up even when he's dead–and at the worst, highest mood too."

–Connect a brain to a heavyarms automata.

Any technician would have laughed it off, saying that it was 'impossible'. In the face of such a difficult question, Marie too laughed at it.

Vermouth easily stabbed the high frequency blade, fulfilling the mission as planned, and only destroying the AI. His movements were flawless, so precise there was nothing to nitpick.

I see. This guy's perverted and infuriating, but he doesn't just have a mouth–looks like he will get the job done completely.

He repaid Naoto's magic with a miracle.

"Now then…it's my turn to get to work–"

–30 seconds. That was the time limit Naoto had designated.

30 seconds for them to **gather the enemies**, and while the enemies continued to increase in numbers and swarm upon Naoto, Marie, Vermouth and the 'Black Tortoise' Halter while AnchoR and RYUZU were relied upon to protect them.

"Ehh–I'm taking you down! Piece of cake!"

Marie deliberately put on a front to pump herself up–and with a heinous smirk, she roared.

At that instant–time slowed.

Or at least Marie felt.

The voices vanished, and in her spreading consciousness, she glanced at the situation in front of her.

She threw Halter's head directly upwards, her arms spread like wings as she laid

out her tools.

She repaired the destroyed thought system–2,876 parts in total, by analyzing them, dissecting them, and then–modify the automata control system that was modified prior to this, before **Halter lands in her hands another 2.4 seconds later.**

–The operation itself was simple. It was tougher for her to fix RyuZU.

But the tension felt was unmatched.

Marie felt her bones creaking, her muscles having goosebumps, her blood boiling.

If she was to make a single misstep, or be wrong in her theory, Halter would never wake up.

Also, this would potentially be the final blow she would personally deal–and might end up killing Halter.

With such fear and pressure, Marie's lips curled into a bewitching curve.

(–You can do it, Marie. If it's you, you can do it–!)

The preparations for dismantling and connecting were complete. Soon after, Halter's head returned to her her hand.

–There was another 27.6 seconds left.

With precision and pace, Marie connected the head to the control system–there was still another 7.6 seconds once the work was done. It took her 6.1 seconds for the nervous system to be tested, 4.9 seconds to adjust the system to a simulation closest to human thoughts, 3.3 seconds for the machine to be reactivated externally, and another 4.1 seconds until Halter awoke again.

It took her a total of 26 seconds. She had only 2 seconds to spare in unforeseen cases.

(–What? **I went over by 2 seconds**…!)

At that moment, Marie felt as though time had stopped.

Her heart raced. She sensed that the surrounding voices had vanished, that her body temperature was dropping.

Her tension and concentration was raised to the limit, and one felt as though his

consciousness had risen, to a place where only RyuZU could reach in this universe.

It was like the ‘Mute Scream’, extending the gap between zero and one second to infinity.

The only difference was–

(I’m so slow–! Hurry up and move…!)

Her body was unable to catch up with that one second stretched to its limits.

It felt as though she was drowning in a sea of tar, her movements so slow and sluggish, frustrating.

–But to Naoto and the other bystanders, it was to a point of magic.

All the spare parts and tools were flying, returning to where they belonged through the pull of gravity–that certainly appeared to be the case.

If such a scene itself was not a ‘miracle’, what else would be?

“…I can’t believe it…hey, Naoto–is that woman really human…?”

Vermouth could not help but mutter and ask, but Naoto answered,

“Yep, that’s a genius. You see it, AnchoR?”

“…More amazing, than, amazing…”

“AnchoR, you shouldn’t be mistaken. That is simply–the limits of an ordinary person.”

AnchoR turned her head around as she dealt with the incoming bombardment assaults of the enemy, and RyuZU–

“….**For now.**”

Showed a conflicted expression in her tone as she answered–

However, Marie left these external matters far behind her head.

Her consciousness was locked in, so deep in, so sharp, so magnified and intricate.

She recalled Vermouth's words,

Aren't you underestimating the brain of a veteran soldier? One so grizzled even the weapons are part of his flesh and blood?"

Yeah Marie thought.

I did underestimate them. Right now, I'm able to understand because I've mastered all the machinery I touched. The movement formed by the gears, cylinders, wires, screws, springs, and the parts–I understand them all.

If I have the heart, I can state the types and number of parts involving each section, even their state of deprecation.

No, not just this, this machinery, the massive movement involved–

*—**And even this city**–!!!*

(–Uu.)

Her spreading consciousness realized danger.

There was an automatic cannon firing at them from approximately 3km away.

Naoto and the others were busy with the nearby enemies, and did not seem to have realized–

Marie was about to warn, but she was short of breath.

She was unable to breathe, suffocating in the sea of tar. Her body, once in a superhuman activity state, recalled its status as a human, and her clear consciousness was increasingly dulled.

(Not–yet!)

Her work was yet to be done. She needed another second to adjust the control system–it failed. The system needed another two seconds to recover.

There was another 8 seconds left. Marie concentrated her drifting consciousness and continued to work–done!

–Machine reboot, starting.

1, 2, 3–success. Another 3 seconds left.

(–Move. Move move move move move move move–get moving–Halter!)

There was no mistake in her work. That should be the case.

But the machine, with momentum entered, did not respond.

–All she had to do was to wait for Halter to wake up.

The automatic cannon fired. Marie could even sense the bullet accelerating in the barrel.

Why did Naoto not realize it–Marie had such a doubt, but she immediately answered her doubt.

That person–'could not hear anything faster than supersonic'–at this moment, she realized this.

There was still–1.2 seconds left.

This cannon was aimed so accurately, even Marie was about to laugh at this. This cannon was fired in a straight line at this, and in 1.2 seconds, the cannon would rip and batter Marie's body, blowing up the opened armor from within, blowing Halter's brain apart.

Marie clearly saw this future visual–but at that moment–

Her feet shook.

Marie's extended consciousness was captured back into its original time, and she lost balance.

While the impact swept her to the side and sent her flying, she finally understood, barely.

The machine was slightly shifted to the side–that alone caused the certain fatal cannon to miss like a dream.

And then, the 'Black Tortoise' with Halter's head connected to it spun around massively, as though the earth was twisted around, and with its right arm, skilfully

grabbed Marie right when the latter fell off.

And also, it fired the main cannons on the shoulders, the thermobaric cannon vaporized the automatic cannon that was more than 3km away, with such startling precision and speed even for Naoto's standards–or RyuZU and AnchoR's standards.

The 'Black Tortoise' even ignited flames, without even a single pause, spinning the inner wheels on both legs, racing off–no, it was drifting around in a large curve, firing the 30cm machine gun.

The torrent of bullets were as accurate as a sniper rifle, eliminating the enemies even RyuZU and AnchoR could not fend off.

"–M-mama!"

AnchoR hurriedly ran over to catch Marie while the latter was thrown off by the recoil of the intensive machine's movements.

But at the same time–the 'Black Tortoise' continued to run berserk.

The sub cannons in both hands were spraying shots–no, firing shots wildly as it spun around, using its thick armor and massive legs, sending the surrounding light-armor automata flying.

Marie blankly widened her eyes in shock as she saw the rampage of this demon, muttering,

"…hatler…?"

Coming out from the 'Black Tortoise' connected with Halter's brain was just an artificial killing intent.

He was crushing everything he could see, trampling them, and there was nary an emotion to be felt from within.

"Did I…fail somewhere–"

While Marie asked with a shocked voice, Naoto merely noted blankly,

"Fail? Eh? When did you fail, Marie? That's uncle alright."

'–Eh?"

"I shall explain matters in a way Master Marie, so pitifully lacking in

understanding, can do so–or that even a monkey will be able to understand. If you assumed that we are under attack, Master Marie, you should be headed to an optometrist."

Marie turned around, and found that RyuZU stopped attacking, smiling there as she stood still.

–After a reminder, she realized that they were not attacked by the 'Black Tortoise' in any way.

Bu in that case, it was horrifying, what was with the emotionless precision…?

And to prove that, the 'Black Tortoise' fired another two shots from the main cannon.

The heavyarms automata several kilometers away were hit directly, vaporizing–and then…

"–Shit…which bastards were attacking me while I'm sleeping?"

Once there was no enemy to be wary of,

The 'Black Tortoise'–no, Halter finally let out a muzzled voice from the external speakers, howling unhappily.

Upon hearing this, Marie inadvertently blinked with teary eyes, seeming hiding her tears as she exclaimed,

"Halter! Halter, do you hear me!?"

"Ah? …oh Milady. What's with this situation…wait, what's with this disgusting vision–compound eyes? Wait, did you connect me to an automata? Look what you've done."

Once Halter understood the situation, the voice changed from anger to disdain, and Marie refuted while teary and smiling,

"Seriously–look what you made me do! What were you doing before this!"

"Oh, sorry…I had a little nap."

Upon hearing Halter's words, Marie repeated blankly,

"–Napping…you didn't respond when I connected to the voice installation because of–"

"Oh, did that happen? No well, my sensors were cut off, so I felt like sleeping for some reason…sorry about that. I really am. It seems I haven't had such a nice nap for a long time."

"–"

Marie gave off a dangerous presence, shivering.

So that's it? This guy doesn't care about my worry, and just slept, is that it?

–I'm so gonna kill him.

"Missy, I told you, didn't it? That big brother would wake up–with the worst, highest mood possible."

While Marie made this dangerous declaration, Vermouth interrupted with a laugh.

"Those soldiers attacked while sleeping on the battlefield will abandon all 'reason' at the next moment, and fight back. The body and mind are so tense to the limit–it's the perfect time to kill. So one of the few things people will abide by on the battlefield–is to forbid night attacks."

Marie looked bewildered, but unsurprised as she sighed.

And on the other hand, Halter, in the head of the 'Black Tortoise' that displayed peerless skill, looked skeptical upon seeing an unfamiliar face, saying,

"–Are you that kid with the head left? What, have you woken up to that kind of interest?"

"Impossible. This is the amazing body your Missy gave me. Don't judge this by its appearance. There's a big cock down there. If I like it, I might even fuck that little slut I'm in love with in the ass."

"–Oh?"

RyuZU spoke with a chilly voice,

"This person, who intends to reach his demonic claws of epic pervertedness at

Master Naoto is a homosexual–or I shall correct myself, a homosexual doll?”

The scythes of the death god closed in, but Vermouth continued on with much boldness.

“Calm down, Missy doll. It’s just an expression. I’m just the number one fan hoping to see your master topple this world around.”

“…Is that so? I shall interpret that as an accurate analysis of Master Naoto and spare you. However, if you are you look at my Master Naoto with those lewd eyes–”

“I said that I didn’t, did I. I do like women as any ordinary man will…but too bad you missed the chance. That kid was dressed up as a girl–little girl Naoto wasn’t bad either, you know?”

RyuZU immediately froze.

Like a data automata that was not greased, she turned to look at Naoto with a creaky voice.

“—-Master Naoto, have you finally awakened to such unique fetishes when I ceased to function.”

“I’m used to seeing those eyes from everyone else, but that contemptuous eyes of your are really depressing, RyuZU! It’s a disguise, a disguise!”

“Papa…you were dressed…really cute, you know?”

“—-So, other than me, and that amalgam of that upsized Mister, everyone else saw it?”

RyuZU’s question voice was quivering.

Even Marie could tell the feelings in them.

It was a rare, startling fact, but it appeared that RyuZU–was utterly devastated.”

Marie sighed, and told RyuZU,

“If you don’t mind, the one who dolled Naoto up did take photos. More importantly now is–”

“Understood. I’ll snatch them even if I have I have to kill.”

RyuZU gave a cold expression, cutting Marie off.

And in the face of the pressure from RyuZU's glare, "Ah, she's for real" while Marie had such a thought, and was preparing to die–

AnchoR tugged at RyuZU's sleeve, saying,

"Sister…this…"

She took a few photos out from her pocket, and handed them to RYuZU.

With trembling hands, RyuZU received the photos, looked around, and after some careful observation, embraced the photos in her chest, marvelling away. She quickly kept them within, showing the smile of a Saintess.

“AnchoR–as my sister, you accomplished something really wonderful. You do know you did just save someone’s life, do you not?”

“…Is that mine?”

Marie let out a trembling voice.

AnchoR then beamed at her sister, before reporting,

“And…and, I went on, a date, with papa…I’m really, really happy!”

The smile vanished from RyuZU’s face.

“…Is that so? You’re happy?”

“Uh…erm, um…?”

AnchoR nervously nodded. RyuZU gave a sarcastic smile as she curled her lips, saying,

“Is that so? Now that is wonderful, AnchoR. Next time, if you are to exclude me, I shall deal with it as necessary, so be careful. To be precise, I shall be dealing with it through force.”

“Woah, RyuZU!? I won’t allow you sisters to fight–”

“…So-sorry…but AnchoR doesn’t want to fight…AnchoR probably might end up winning accidentally.”

“What are you saying, AnchoR? The one to be punished will be Master Naoto, of course.”

“–Eh, me!?”

Naoto exclaimed in a squeal.

RyuZU coldly stared at her master, saying,

“It is rather unfortunate, Master Naoto–but the negotiation will be limited to a ‘sisters combo’ at most.”

“I-I”m so sorrrryyy!! I fail as a husband for leaving my wife behind on a date!”

Naoto immediately kowtowed.

Halter watched everything from above, and sighed, saying,

“–I say, isn’t it time for you guys to answer my first question? What’s the situation now?”

Oh yeah. Marie shook her head. As Halter finally returned, she nearly forgot their current predicament. She shook her head, and was about to brief him on everything, but Naoto stood up to cut Marie off–simply answering,

“An **interesting** situation”–

“We’re going to beat up those idiots who wrecked RyuZU, uncle Halter and the entire Akihabara until they cry, boil them alive. Anyone that gets in our way, send them flying, anyone naggy, shut him up. Just like that.”

–It appeared those words were more than enough. Halter then said.

“I see. Now that’s interesting. I’ll chip in.”

“That’s the reason for that machine. How are you do?”

“No problems–thanks Milady. You did good as always.”

Halter skilfully manipulated the hand of the ‘Black Tortoise’, giving a thumbs up.

Marie looked somewhat nonchalant and somewhat delighted as she looked up at Halter, lfiting her chest as she proudly boasted,

“Of course. Who do you think I am?”

“**“Haha–now then, Naoto. It looks like you’re the commander now. What’s the order?”**

Halter chuckled as he asked.

RyuZU and AnchoR stared at Naoto.

Vermouth did the same, and even Marie too pricked her ears, hoping not to miss out on what Naoto would say.

Naoto, RyuZU, AnchoR, Vermouth, and–Halter.

When she first heard his plan, she found it silly, and even when she decided to take action, found it silly. Even when she actually did so, she found it silly. Even at this point, she felt it was silly.

But at this point, for some reason, it felt that no matter what she could hear from Naoto's mouth–she could do it all.

All the stares were gathered upon Naoto, who gave a defiant smirk.

He looked around the military that surrounded them, muttering,

"…Right, looks like the remaining forces are gathered around us as planned."

As long as they left Marie behind and continued to suppress, they would be able to let Marie leave the battlefield, so that she would be able to get to work safely.

That was the reason for Naoto and the others' intention to delay their assault by 30 seconds.

"First–in the remaining 38 seconds, we'll eliminate all 378 enemies without killing anyone♪."

Upon hearing those words, Halter chuckled.

"What's with that–easy peasy."

Such words caused everyone present to give a little smile–and then…

–22 seconds.

The gang spent that amount of time eliminating the remaining 378 enemy weapons, machines and threats–

Pointing middle fingers at news helicopters as they stormed in.

The massive gates were opened, and Naoto and the others entered the palace.

The path was wide, the height tall enough for Halter, controlling the heavyarms automata, to stroll in leisurely.

They moved forward in a straight line, finally arriving at the massive hall in the atrium.

A group of people were waiting.

They were dozens of armed JSDF soldiers, watching them with numerous barricades on.

Right behind the soldiers were 2 slightly dated armored soldiers.

It appeared they knew of what happened outside the palace, and there was a fearful atmosphere directed at Naoto and the others, but it was obvious that they had an agitation of not wanting to give up their lives so easily.

Right when Marie was pondering about what to do–

Walking up front from behind the JSDF soldiers–was a young woman.

She waved off the hands of the soldiers blocking, and went right at them.

Marie beamed, *Looks like she remembers me"* she thought.

"Please wait a moment." Marie told Naoto and the others, before moving forward.

Both of them stood 2m away from each other, stopping in their tracks.

Marie bowed elegantly,

"–**Nice to meet you for the first time** Princess Hoshinomiya."

"Yes…nice to meet you, I suppose. For the first time, we're meeting each other, Miss Terrorist."

The woman facing her–Houko too lowered her head elegantly.

After a wordless greeting, Marie continued,

"Now then, I shall give my name. My name is Maribel–manipulated by the worst terrorist in history who caused such a crisis to this country."

She pointed at the back, indicating *it's him*. Naoto, who was pointed at, widened his eyes,

"–H-hey you! You just tried to push the blame right? You left an exit for yourself

so that you can blame me if things go wrong now, right!?”

And Marie showed a smile, ignoring the boy who continued to yap behind him.

Houko looked slightly perturbed as she asked,

“Now then, Miss Maribel. Are all of you here due to a reason I imagine?”

“Perhaps it’s a little different.”

Marie shrugged.

“We’re just here to visit for our own purpose.”

Houko frowned, and then asked again.

“…**Is that really alright**?”

“Of course. That is our choice, our methods…and I suppose you are mistaken, so i shall correct you. The mastermind this time–is really that fool.”

Upon hearing those words, Houko widened her eyes in surprise.

It seemed she realized everything, and lowered her head in apology to Naoto, who was behind Marie.

Houko then lifted her head, speaking in a harsh tone contrasting her demeanour,

“Now then–to the terrorists I am meeting for the first time, I shall express my fury. You have committed a grave crime to destroy my country in an unprecedented matter, and attempted to topple it, which is something I shall never forgive in my life. You also have the intention to threaten me for your own purposes, and I believe such grievous acts will be appropriately retributed.”

Houko glared at Marie and the others with elegance, looking at each of them one by one.

Then, the black eyes showed a firm will, saying,

“Now then, state your cause. With that malicious intent, what do you hope to do to me?”

And answering Houko’s adamant words–was RyuZU.

“About that…it is an emergency, so we shall tidy things up as it is outside. Is that

correct, Master Naoto?"

"Yeah, enough of that **publicity**. I'll leave the last bit to you just in case."

Upon hearing Naoto's words, RyuZU bowed politely, touching the clock in front of her chest.

If she had chosen that method from the method right from the beginning, they would have wiped out the military outside in zero seconds, let alone 7 minutes–but they deliberately chose not to do so.

For that was because…'publicity' was meant to be obvious and easy to understand.

If nobody could understand, there would be no purpose to the 'publicity'. However, after an actual 'impossible' demonstration of wiping out the outside forces in 7 minutes, at this point–

That 'one line' would be most suited as the conclusion, the best 'finale' to top things off.

RyuZU's black dress became a white wedding dress, and her activation words–were–

"–'Mute Scream'–"

This irrationally did not allow for anyone to understand; the 'publicity' began abruptly–and ended.

6 minutes and 48 seconds passed since the initial declaration–and all military forces inside and outside the Palace were completely paralyzed.

"–As reported earlier, the criminal calls himself Naoto Miura–"

This report was broadcasted live to the entire world.

That was a visual the entire Capital, no, all of Japan–the whole world was staring at intently.

The civilians on the streets, the politicians who spent days in meetings, the police and ‘military’ embroiled in meaningless conflicts, and even the foreign enterprises were staring at this report with wide eyes.

Amongst them, the ‘military’ and the Enterprises–were watching this feed solemnly.

It was to be expected.

“Also, according to statements from survivors, we have confirmed two self-proclaimed Initial-Y automata. It is said most of the destruction is caused by those two units–“

That was the main point.

Of course, the forces surrounding the Palace was merely a ragtag bunch of rebels. The core person was an impulsive young chap, still lacking in experience on leading his troops.

And as for equipment, most of them were either for standby use, or were old models.

But, even considering that–

“And I repeat. The criminal group has occupied the Palace for an hour. Currently, there has been no news of any deceased–“

–7 minutes.

To be precise, it was 6 minutes and 48 seconds.

It was a group no more than 10 people, and without causing any dead–they spent that time eliminating two massive forces of ‘military’.

Results wise–Was there anyone world who could accomplish this?

It was easy if one ignored the casualties, or possible if one spent the time to do so.

–But nobody could do this in such a short time.

The more one understood military matters and clockwork technology, the more one could understand this answer.

Furthermore, no matter how many times the interviewing helicopters slowed

down and repeated it countless times–none of them was able to determine how the JSDF was wiped out.

That indicated that the criminal group ‘did something’ at a speed without leaving a visual frame.

The ones triggering such a ridiculous phenomenon were the self-proclaimed Initial-Y series.

The legendary automata left behind by that ‘Y’–the one who rebuilt this planet.

Any ordinary person would know that–those were legendary relics, urban legends that never actually existed.

Those who knew technology felt that–if they existed, they were the inheritance of the world.

Those who knew politics knew that–they actually existed, but none of them could be activated.

But the 5 Enterprises, and certain politicians, who knew more classified information that would definitely not be divulged to the public, they understood.

That they existed–and if activated, would be the toughest weapons to deal with.

With that, all their understanding was overwritten, or convicted.

The series of images in the report left no room for doubt. No matter what technology was used, they could not be replicated–that was the proof that the Initial-Y series actually existed.

At this moment, the reporting visuals the entire world was looking at–was suddenly interrupted by static.

And at the same time.

With the Multigrid Tokyo as the core, there was an intense throbbing spreading.

All comms facilities stopped, and the ‘resonance gears’ within spun in a way differing from their settings.

The Core Tower gears regulating the city’s functions moved in a way that never happened before.

It was not a simple malfunction, and neither was it spinning improperly after

years of decay. Despite the system running as normal, they just did not abide by the Manager's instructions.

And so, the Tokyo residents recalled something very similar.

–2 days ago.

While everyone else was helplessly watching the situation develop, a 'criminal intent' hijacked TV and radio, sounding so cheerful–

"Laaadddiieesss—annnnndddd—geeennnnttttllleeemen!! And to all the unimportant people, do you remember meeee voice!? Hasn't it been a while? You miss me, maaaannnnn–♥
Kept you waiting there. Sorry for keeping you on your seats the past few days! Check it out! I love you all, baby baby baby–!!"

The nightmarish scream, and the face of the boy who yelled this.

Was aired on the screens as the whole world watched on.

"Those massive idiots who fell in love with me the last time and hoping to see my face are in for a treat now! For all the mass idiots requests, I'll be showing my face for the first time today. Whoopee whoops–! Have you fallen for this pretty boy here!?"

That maniacal, light-hearted voice echoed from the corridor speakers–

And a man was in the communications base, located inside the ruling party headquarters of Grid Kasumigaseki.

"Looks like Professor Marie and the others are having fun there."

Yuu Karasawa, one of the few who understood the intent of that message, gave a wry smile.

…Professor Marie must be seething now. He thought.

Based on her preferences, this was more of an entertainment genre. She was certainly showing a face she never showed at the 'Meister Guild'.

If possible, he wanted to personally witness her face at the scene and take a photo for memorabilia, but–

“Work work work–now, goodness, laborers have it tough.”

He stared forward, and there was a plain door.

The sign painted on the door itself was ‘Central Communications Room’.

This room had installations used to carry out long distance communications, the signal reaching even the other end of the world.”

“But no point in complaining. Let’s get to work–as a consultant.”

Though this is beyond my scope of duties–Karasawa took a little breath, exhaling it.

–And then, with all his might, he kicked down the door in front of him.

“–!”

With a loud thud, the door broke.

Karasawa immediately stormed into the room, and a man turned his head around in surprise.

He recognized that face–it was the man who slipped out of the meeting 2 days ago.

“W-who are you!? What are you doing here?”

“Oh dear, that is what I want to ask you instead.”

The man’s face was contorted in an ugly manner due to anxiety.

In contrast, Karasawa was looking relaxed, his lips showing a tender smile.

“May I ask to whom where you communicating to right now–as a consultant♪”

“I-I don’t have an obligation to answer you.”

“Even if I don’t force you to answer. I’ll know immediately by checking the records.”

“You don’t have the right to do that, do you!”

“–Of course I don’t. But at this point, who’ll blame me?”

At that moment, the man’s face changed, and he drew a handgun from his chest.

From that movement, Karasawa understood that thought he was disguised as a body of flesh and blood, this man’s body was obviously a cyborg suited for combat.

With a fluid motion, the man raised the gun, and the trigger was–

“Hey, but speaking of which, I’m kinda sad–really wanna cry–I thought you’ll be weak, but never like that~ besides, it’s useless of you–or am I being too strong here? I’m really sorry!”

With a crisp sound, the handgun dropped onto the floor.

“–Really, it is just as young Naoto Miura said.”

Karasawa maintained his smile as he told the other party.

“You’re battling a Meister with a cyborg body–aren’t you underestimating me right now?”

Karasawa kept the tools he held in both hands, and looked down.

The man, whose prosthetics were immediately dissected in a moment, was sprawled on the floor, growling.

Karasawa raised the gun, saying,

“I’ll give you 3 seconds. Now, if you mind telling me, given that you ‘stole’ the ruling party’s communications systems, who were you communicating with?”

“Ho-how much do you know–?”

“Okay, end of the line.”

Karasawa fired the gun without any hesitation. The bullets hit each of the prosthetic.

“Be grateful here, you know? I do want to finish you off, but because of a certain cute girl’s request, I’m merciful enough to spare your life. I suppose someone else will find you within the 43 hours until your vitals functions are rendered

ineffectual. Now then–

Karasawa tossed the now depleted gun aside, muttering to himself, saying,

“Someone obviously not with the government is using the government’s headquarters communications to do something with someone. Please allow me to check–ah, I suppose there is a permit needed?”

Karasawa then grabbed the shirt of the collapsed man.

He showed the ID card towards the visual sensor that had ceased function.

“I’m the consultant hired by the Technical Bureau, Yuu Karasawa. Mind showing me your log?”

Karasawa shook the man violent on the shoulders, forcing the latter to nod, and with a smile, threw the man’s face towards the floor.

“Thank you for your assistance♪”

Karasawa told the unconscious man, and turned around.

He took out a portable terminal from his pocket, and connected to Central in a fluid motion.

While extracting the comms records over the past two hours, he said,

“Ah–on a side note. I’m not an official member of the Technical Bureau. Once you’re determined to have made contact with something, what happens to you doesn’t involve my salary…even if anyone finds out that this place is opened and ‘steals’ it,, it’ll be all deemed as your failure–my apologies.”

At the same time, Karasawa smoothly tapped at the terminal.

While doing so, the communications circuit showed notifications linking to 18 places outside.

“Now then–is this considered doing something within my pay?”

Having stated this boldly, Karasawa hummed as he checked the records.

And at the same time–

“To be honest, this is so flimsy it’s disappointing. I spent all the effort at Akihabara warning everyone of a terrorist attack to ‘lure’ in the enemy, and this is what I get back! Really, everyone’s not showing me any face now, maaaannn–!?”

The chief commander at the Tokyo ‘military’ command headquarters at Grid Ichidaya heard such a crazy broadcast, his face red, his fist shivering.

The surrounding officers were slamming at the table, growling away–but the chief commander held in more fury, fear and apprehension, biting his lips.

–He could not refute.

The massive weapon still occupying Akihabara, and as the word implied, ‘instantly’ controlled the Palace–

How should he refute when the enemy actually backed up his bold words…?

“Right, that’s how it is! If I gotta say, you’re too weak, can’t even take a hit. I’m too lazy to bother going along with my original plan now!”

And this broadcast–upon thinking about the situation that would occur with this broadcast, the Chief Commander inadvertently shivered.

–The matter of electromagnetic weapons was leaked to the entire world.

And coupled with this visual, the whole world knew that an incident happened in Tokyo.

Such a severe threat–even in consideration of the surrounding Asian countries, the ISS members would hurriedly vote to use the ‘Tall Wand’ earliest tonight.

This proposal would require the permission of the Japanese government–but the Prime Minister’s selfish request was yet to be retracted. No, even without that, Japan could not control its own ‘military’, and failed to act in this crisis, so it might be assumed to devoid of government control.

However, the Chief Commander's thoughts–

"So, let's try spicing things up here, baby! Come on! Everyone, shake your asses and yell with me, yeah——oh yeah! Thank you! Thank~you everyone! To repay your expectations–! I declare that in 3 hours–"

He was cut off by the criminal.

"We're gonna let the *Multi Grid Tokyo collapse with a boom*–! Yeah yeah!!"

In response to this–the 'military' headquarters–no, all of Japan froze up.

–3 hours?

The Chief Commander stood up with eyes wide.

3 hours, he said? In such a short time, even the ISS members would be unable to vote to use the 'Tall Wand'. No, they would be unable to prepare firing ti–

But while he was thinking, his thoughts were cut off,

"Ohh—sorry!! Sorry for being careless in leaving a VIP around. I was too carried away! Hey, come on, VIP–get in!!"

And along with the exaggerated movements of the boy, the camera shook.

Shown there–was a woman tied in rope.

The Chief Commander was very familiar with this woman.

No, every Japanese watching this visual would have seen this woman before.

“–Every person in the country, please calm down and listen to me.

The First Royal Princess, Princess Houko Hoshinomiya.

Probably the noblest of all women in this country, and she was now a pitiful captive.

Her face was pale, blood drained from her face.

But she adamantly lifted her face, and through the camera, spoke to the people.

“They have ‘actually’ controlled Multi Grid Tokyo’s city systems control–the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’. This scene is likely the most powerful evidence.

Upon hearing the Princess’ words–Japan, and even the entire world, was left speechless.

–The ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ of a major city in the world got ‘controlled…?

The one being tied up was the Princess, still giving off a regal vibe, but what she said blew the minds of the people, the ‘military’, all the important people–even the ISS members who were summoned to the headquarters in Switzerland.

Even the common civilians could understand the meaning behind those words.

The terrifying truth, that Japan–and even the fates of the whole of East Asia, was in the hands on those vicious brutes.

–This was no longer a problem pertaining simply to Japan.

It concerned the safety of the world. However, the Princess, still in such a perilous moment, adamantly continued,

“I do request that the ‘military’ do not care about my personal safety and seize the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ immediately–they are being serious. To all citizens, please calmly obey the instructions of your local police, and leave the Capital Circle–!”

With a brief shriek, the Princess was pulled aside, vanishing from the screen.

Appearing on the screen instead was a boy–Naoto Miura, giving a heinous, contorted face.

"Hey hey hey–!? What now, Princess!? Why are you talking on your own now!? Get too naughty and I'll tie you in a bondage suit and show you being knocked up with a big cock to the entire country–wait old man! Why are you giving me such weird cue cards! I have a wife and daughter here! It'll end up disrupting my family here! Ah, yeah. It's about the the 2 Initial-Y series that were just reported! How about it? They're cute, right? But you can't reproduce them for merchandise. I might end up buying them! Do negotiate about that through the firms! Violation of human image rights is a complete no go here!"

–This sudden sequence of broadcasts denied anyone the chance to think of anything.

The woman who appeared on the screen was the first Lady of Japan–despite not having any political power, she was the symbol of the country, and one of the few influential people culturally in the world.

She was acting in place of her ailing father, the Emperor, her importance was as significance as the Queen of England and the president of the United States.

–Yes, a VIP.

No matter whether anyone was a civilian or not, all of them had the same thoughts.

This young, beautiful Princess was captured by the terrorists, yet she remained firm-willed, and even any ordinary civilian and foreigner felt a resonating feeling in their hearts.

And then, they stopped thinking–hastily coming to a conclusion.

"Ah wait! Enough already! I told you not to move. Argh, damn it, now the process' all messed up! This Princess is a downer! Hey, if you're gonna be so disobedient, I'll kill you!"

The boy gleefully said such words.

And all witnessing this had a common thought–that the boy offended something that he should not have, an unforgivable criminal–the 'rage' at one person alone expanded massively.

"…I see. This is rather impressive."

Inside the massive weapon Yatsukahagi'–

Gennai Hirayama silently muttered as he watched the visuals on the giant screen in the control room.

–Their intent was obvious.

They could have shut the Princess up if they wanted everyone to know that they had her as a hostage. There was no need to force her to talk.

However, they allowed her to talk as she wanted–for they did not need to.

–At the very least, it was enough excuse to allow the 'military' to intervene in the internal scuffle.

The civilians, who should be in a panic, would more or less obey the police instructions.

And as one could assume, the Princess would then exist as a hostage.

At the very least, no commander would ignore the Princess' safety and assault the 'Heaven's Pillar'.

Even if they were to, the bombardment on the fort would be a final gambit–they would at least wait for 3 hours, to go along with the time limit declared.

During this time, they…no, 'Y' would…

Leisurely begin work, have full control of the 'Heaven's Pillar' without anyone's obstruction.

–And then destroy the 'Yatsukahagi' without exception.

After that, the ‘military’ launching the coup d’etat on the government would vanish.

Leaving behind truths beneficial to certain people–

“Ahh, impressive…now we are unable to do anything.”

“M-my Lord! We should at least declare our intentions now!”

The lieutenant stood by the side, exclaiming in shock.

Gennai showed a serene look at the lieutenant, asking,

“Oh…and then what? We have no relation to those people. Our intention is a coup d’etat, like that. Do you think anyone will believe in such nonsense?”

“Th-that is–”

The commander was speechless, but shook his head, saying,

“Bu-but if this keeps up, the capital will collapse in 3 hours. In any case–!”

“Calm down, lieutenant.”

Gennai said.

“Those people have no intention to letting the capital fall. This–is all ‘within exceptions’.

–Yes, they had no such intentions.

Simply put, all they were doing was with the intention to bear all the sins.

Including the Shiga ‘military’–they would bear the sins of the ‘military’, the government, the enterprises, and all the nightmares and malice that shook this country, gather the hearts of the people, and erase their sins.

Their aim was–to save this country.

There was no casualty when they eliminated the ‘military’. Would such people actually cause Tokyo to collapse?

Of course it was a bluff.

–Suddenly, Gennai thought of something.

In Ancient mythology–there was a man who bore all the sins of humanity, and was executed.

He let out something like a groan from his tight lips.

"–First he takes the form of a God, and then now as a Messiah?"

"M-my lord…?"

Gennai ignored the lieutenant's voice, asking,

"Report–what is the recharge rate now?"

Upon hearing the commander's composed voice, a communication's officer frantically replied,

"Y-yes, currently at 72%! M-my lord, how do we deal with this…?"

"Cease all mobility power. Recharge to 82% within 12 minutes."

All the people on standby in the commander room gave skeptical looks.

–Is there a meaning to recharge at this point?

–We should be escaping from Akihabara right now, right?

Gennai silenced his subordinates with a glare, and muttered,

"Come on–show me how much you have predicted. Have you realized that I have a few tricks left…'Y'?"

Chapter 3 – 07:15 – Liberator

Now then–

The criminals who terrorized Japan into oblivion and sent the world into a vortex of chaos.

Once he declared this unprecedented, unparalleled act–the boy who proclaimed to wipe off Japan from the map, he was–

“Fwuaa~~…ahh~ really~…haa, I live for the sake of enjoying this happiness…”

Was relaxing leisurely, as though he was in the comfort of his home.

To be specific, he was sleeping on the thighs of a black dress girl–an automata. His face was buried in those thighs as he frolicked away in a bored manner.

The automata girl providing her thighs–RyuZU said,

“Pardon my words, Master Naoto, but since you are born with a cheap head, I suppose this alone would have allowed you to enjoy eons of enjoyment.

But Naoto, who had his face still buried in RyuZU’s thighs, refuted with a vague voice,

“How rude, RyuZU! Really rude! Is there a pillow better than your thigh laps!”

“–Do pardon me. It is humiliating for me to be refuted so through logic by you, Master Naoto–but there is truly nothing in this world that is superior to my thighs, or even a strand of my hair. As you may tell, my thighs are an exalted treasure even God would be envious of…undoubtedly, sleeping on my lap is an unparalleled privilege. My apologies for my mistake.”

RyuZU bent her neck, lowering her head in apology.

A young girl in red and white armor–another automata saw this, placed her index finger in her mouth, and muttered,

“…Papa, I want, an order….”

“Okkaay, okay okay! Come to papa’s belly~”

Naoto turned, lying face up, beaming away, spreading his arms wide, indicating ‘come here!”

AnchoR leapt to Naoto’s belly, saying happily,

“…ehehe…papa’s warm…”

Naoto patted his forehead, yelling,

“–kaahh–! There’s no one happier than me in this world right now!”

“Master Naoto, you crushed the masses’ plain happiness, and I suppose in return–no, even considering absolutes, it did not matter how the world is now as long you have two such prized, exalted pieces of arts in AnchoR and me even the Heavens will be envious of.”

–Right.

Phew, at this moment, Noto’s feelings were somewhere beyond cloud nine.”

Naoto seemed to have abandoned the chaos in the lower realm behind him, and muttered to himself, praying,

“Ooh…to the great certain person who gave birth to me, RyuZU and AnchoR on this world, I love you–!!!”

Well, allow us to ignore this space of idiocy that is filled with such sweetness, it was as though sugar was caramelized and applied everywhere.

–The ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

As its name implied, it was the country’s Core Tower that would seemingly pierce into the clouds, and at this point, they were on the 20th level.

At this point, there was a tense atmosphere engulfed there, comparable to the battlefield from before.

“Professor Conrad! Everyone! How’s the sense like!”

Marie yelled, and there were 18 automata facing the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’s amazingly intricate constructs in the level, busy with their work, turned in unison to give Marie a thumbs up.

That was not the reaction of AIs.

–They were 18 technicians from all over Tokyo, in Resonance Bases, controlling the maintenance automata of the 'Heaven's Pillar' that were modified for remote control.

The 18 of them were Meisters who admired Marie and assisted–they did display their skills during the original Akihabara terrorist incident.

And their skills were the best amongst Meisters.

They were tucked in the relay stations, controlling the automata, doing precision work–while the clockwork technicians had their senses sealed as they united under Marie's command–showing such precision no ordinary person could understand.

If any of the JSDF technicians who maintained the 'Heaven's Pillar' every day was to see such a scene–though they were Meisters who could be a part of the 'Meister Guid'–surely they would cry and hand in their resignations 'you're taking over this place from today onwards'.

And there's one more–

"Oh this side is going well too, Missy…is this really the ability of a Meister? So cool."

Vermouth noted,

And also–there was an old gentleman's voice coming from the same vocal cord,

"Professor Marie, you do not have to worry about me. I might be the most comfortable one here."

Upon hearing those words, Vermouth continued to chuckle using the body Conrad was controlling,

"I guess so, old man. It's most comfortable for you in 'all kinds of ways', right?"

It was true–that no matter how unwilling Marie was to admit it, she had to agree with Vermouth.

Vermouth's unit was the only remote control unit with specially ordered parts from Conrad's personal collection.

Typically, the resonance installation–the non-contact resonance movement was

something exceptionally hard to replicate, even in the 1,000 years where they discovered artificial atoms.

Amongst them, the largest resonance distance was approximately 40km.

However, the ones that used such precious materials without restraint, resulting in a '100% purity'–was the 'Long Distance Resonance Gears'.

To be honest, these were parts of the highest quality, the price of one equivalent to constructing a building in a prime location.

Furthermore, if it was for personal use, there would be a need for two of them for the reception and communications–so basic calculation wise, it would be double the pricing.

To be honest–the 'long distance resonance' were not exactly necessary.

There were cabled installations built all over the world, and with many relay stations, one could communicate without from one end of the world to the other end without practically any delay, even if they were short distance communications.

Thus, the only ones requiring this were a few enterprises, the 'military', or the high ranking politicians–who would send classified information frequency and require secrecy.

–But there was an exception.

Perhaps that exception was the reason why Conrad had such a thing, and installed it in this playdoll automata. Marie realized this, and was unable to say anything.

–There were 3 advantages to the 'long distance resonance gears'.

One was 'distance', two was 'secrecy'.

And the third was 'content capacity'.

Obviously, there would be other users using the resonance communication through the relay points. With the limits of the continual movement and resources, there was a limit to the continuous movements that could be done–the resonance movements.

–But it was a different case with the 'long distance resonance gears'.

Of course, it could feed in a massive amount of information far beyond the former.

For example–yes, ‘resonance remote control’ could be done.

And so, the reason why Conrad would have such a rare, precious installation, and installed it in a playdoll automata.

…Marie could only cup her head and grimace.

“But now we have to be thankful for that…right, don’t think too much, Marie.”

Upon hearing Marie mutter and coax herself, Vermouth said,

“I say, Missy, do you know about this? The original reason why this long distance resonance gear was set up wasn’t for ‘distance’, but for ‘information content’.

“…So?”

“In any case, the main driving force of this world has always been about ero–”

“Professor Conrad, do shut this guy up. Please, I’ll leave it to you.”

Marie immediately cut off the conversation, returning to her work.

Thinking about it, it’s strange that they had a rendezvous at a strip bar in case of emergency–no, don’t think about it.

She stopped thinking, and told everyone,

“Everyone, take note, we’re being slower than expected by 18 seconds! Please hurry up!”

There was no time to worry about it.

Since they made their declaration and got 3 hours–there was at least 2 hours in which the ‘military’ would not dare to barge in.

But if the fact that they were using the relay stations was found out, they would be controlled.

And in the worst situation, the locations of the 18 helpers would be traced back and exposed.

So before then, they had to finish their work as soon as possibl–

“Miss Mar–bel.”

Marie lifted her head upon hearing someone call for her.

A young woman–Houko, was standing there with a stiff face.

Marie continued to tap at the simulation control panel connected to the control systems, glancing with her eyes to prompt Houko to continue.

“There is this thing I really have to ask you.”

“–”

Marie had a little idea of what she wanted to ask.

Without answering, Marie glanced to look at Naoto who was failing around with the 2 automata.

Houko followed Marie’s stare, and said,

“–Where did he get the blueprint of the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’?”

“There isn’t such a thing…is there?”

“No. This is why I am asking. You clearly understood the structure of the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, more than us who are in charge of maintaining this place. You are the one supervising, but he was the one giving the initial instructions.”

“–”

“The logical idea is that he obtained the blueprint through some way.”

“Then you’re wrong. We don’t have such a thing, and this guy doesn’t know the structure of the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ until he got here.”

“Do you assume that I will believe that?”

“No…but this is a fact.”

Marie answered, and Houko pressed the issue without giving time to pause,

“So–what you are implying is that this boy merely listened for 6 minutes, and understood the entire structure of the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, is that so?”

Houko felt that it was impossible.

–As its name implied, the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ was the pillar supporting the country of Japan.

Its massiveness, complexity, and intricacy was not something the surrounding Core Towers or clock towers could compare to.

And thus, the Palace staff in charge of maintenance–even the palace did not have a complete understanding of it. All they had was a fragment of the blueprint they spent a thousand years analyzing.

And even that kind of a blueprint was a classified information more secretive than the state records. Even the Prime Minister did not know where it was hidden, let alone try to duplicate it.

Nor could anyone dare to piece those fragments together and understand the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

Yet he easily did it just by listening for 6 minutes?

Houko knew that her face showed a different look.

A chill was creeping up her back.

She had such a feeling when she knew the terrifying capabilities of these adorable automata–but this feeling this had at this point might be more terrifying than back then.

–This boy, more than ‘Y’s inheritance, is dangerous.

The blond girl–Marie seemed to have realized Houko’s thoughts, saying,

“I understand your concerns, but sorry, I can’t explain. Can you please pretend not to have noticed it?”

“I can’t.”

Houko concluded.

She permitted their actions initially for she assumed they were beneficial to the country–in other words, she wanted to ‘make use of them’.

On one hand, they would be the culprits taking the fall for this crumbling country.

And second, to figure out what the people triggering the ‘Akihabara terrorist incident’ wanted to do to the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

Houko herself was not an amateur when it came to clockwork technology. She did have a formal education in a foreign university, and thought her abilities were no match for a Meister, she did have the certification of a Gazelle.

She affirmed the their steps, and the sources of their technology and information, that they were contribution to the safety of the country. They planned countermeasures, preventing repeats–

That was the initial thought she had as she went along with their plans, but…

“–”

Houko narrowed her eyes sharply,

The answer was that–what was the talent of this plain, ordinary looking boy?

How could one counter this one person who could understand the structure of the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ just by listening?

If that was the truth, this boy in front of her–

“He ‘can’t exist’–he is a grievous ‘disaster’ threatening our security.”

Upon hearing Houko’s words, Marie sighed, saying,

“Relax–this isn’t something I can say though. I do think there’s something to this guy’s hearing and senses, but I don’t understand the theory behind it.”

In other words, nobody could replicate it.

If he was gone, there would never be–

Once Houko considered this fact, Marie lowered her voice, telling her,

“I’ll warn you. Given your personality, you might be thinking of killing him once everything is over, but–”

There was no need for the following warning.

Unknowingly, there was a black scythe placed at Houko’s neck. Of course, that scythe–belonged to a black dress automata.

“If you wish to kill yourself, do take ‘a little step’ towards me, no? I can assure you the most painless death in the world.”

The topaz eyes belonged to the real automata, devoid of any emotion.

The girl in red and white beside him stared emotionlessly at Houko,

“…If you dare do anything to papa…I won’t hold back, you know?”

“Hm? Eh, wh-what’s going on?”

The boy appeared to be the only one who did not understand what was going on, looking perplexed.

Houko sighed. It was foolish to die in such a situation.

“My apologies. You may back down.”

Having said that, Houko took a step back, and the black dress automata silently retracted her scythe.

“…Do you understand now?”

Marie said. Houko sighed, nodding.

“Yes. Unfortunately, I seem to be out of ideas…I shall leave this aside and think of countermeasures later on.”

–Looks like Houko gave up on that idea for now.

Right when marie was grateful that her friend managed to keep her life, Houko suddenly took out a little machine from her pocket–it was something like a necklace.

And right when Marie was feeling skeptical, Houko put that thing on her neck, smiling,

“Now then–it has been a while, Marie.”

Houko’s voice was far different from before–it was a voice changer.

It appeared that she had prepared this beforehand, something meant to prevent records of a terrorist cell making contact with the Princess.

So well-prepared–Marie thought as she beamed.

“Yeah. It has been a while, Houko.”

“I’m really happy to be able to meet you again. The last time we met, it was your funeral, right?”

“That coffin is empty, and I was in another country.”

“I already knew that you were alive. I thought that we never had a chance to meet again though.”

There was a chance they could have met if it was the Princess of Japan and her classmate, the Princess of the Breguets.

However, Marie, now known as Maribel Halter, did not have the chance and reason to meet Houko.

For Houko was unlike her fellow technicians, on with a public standing.

Having realized this fact at this point, Marie sighed, feeling dejected, saying,

“–Yeah, glad to see you too.”

Marie then lowered her eyes.

“You’re still wearing that watch?”

“Of course. This is a work of my good friend, an important gift. This child has been with me ever since we went our separate ways.”

Houko touched her left wrist, saying,

“I was so mortified when I heard of your death in Grid Kyoto. It was in my country…and it is late, but I do have to give my apologies.”

“You don’t have to. It’s my decision after all.”

Sounds of rapid-fire typing could be heard on the simulator next to Marie.

The metal belt had numerous holes in it–and the punch card glided down the console.

“But I’m doing this not because this is your country. No matter which country it is, I will do the same thing. I am a clockwork technician after all.”

Having said that, Marie reached her right hand out, her fingers gliding down the metal belt. She was typing the commands into the punchcard, as though she was writing in a torrent like manner.

"…Yeah, you are always the type to seek justice."

Houko noted a little forlornly as she watched Marie work without stopping.

And at this moment–

"Just to ask, why is Marie friends with the Princess of Japan?"

Naoto, still resting on RyuZU's thighs, raised his voice to ask. He was as nonchalant as ever, just voicing whatever doubt he had on his mind.

Marie clicked her tongue unhappily, slapping the control panel.

"I say, Naoto, it's rude to interrupt when someone else is talking."

"Oh, so that's rude–anyway, why?"

"To summarize, I was classmates with her."

Houko answered.

"I was studying in a European university when I met her. However, she graduated with all credits in a single month."

"A month!?"

Naoto widened his eyes, and Marie shrugged,

"Without Houko around to play with me, I would have left in a week."

"Oh! It sounds like I was getting in your way, no?"

"That is it, isn't it? You were always dragging me around."

"Now that is funny, Marie. You are the one who played the most, right? That incident back then still has people in that university talking now."

Marie and Houko continued to bicker as they revisited the past.

But Naoto merely looked back at forth between the duo, saying,

"I don't really understand, but logically, a Princess studying overseas will have

bodyguards or something like that, right? Why is it that she only made friends with Marie?"

"…Seriously, the Breguets is one of the 5 Enterprises of the world. They're French nobility, and I'm the Princess there, you know? Is there a problem for me to get along with the Princess of Japan?"

Marie raised her eyebrow as she answered.

Naoto looked as though he never thought of it, saying,

"Then, uncle Halter calling you 'Milady' is…"

"…? That's a fact. Is there a problem?"

"I thought it was sarcasm."

"Impossible. Of course he's praising me for my intellect, precious bloodline and elegance."

At that instant, Naoto gave a serious look,

"Sorry, I don't get you. Are you joking?"

"…what do you mean? Hold it right there, I'm going to get you to explain that later."

Marie growled as she narrowed her eyes to glare at Naoto.

Seeing that, Houko giggled,

"You have changed a little, Marie. No, perhaps that is how you always were…I am a little envious."

"…Houko?"

Marie titled her head in skepticism.

Houko did not answer, instead speaking with a stern tone,

"Speaking of which, I suppose it is about time for you to tell me now, no? What are you actually planning to do with the 'Heaven's Pillar'?"

"Erm–yeah, I should have informed you beforehand."

Marie, who was speechless, continued on,

“Houko, how much do you know about the massive weapon in Akihabara?”

“There was no definite proof, but looking at the situation, it is obviously an electromagnetic type. As far as I can see from the reports of the Intelligence branch, they are from the old Shiga ‘military’, wanting to launch a coup d’etat on the government.”

“–As expected of you.”

Marie nodded, looking impressed.

“So, anyway?”

“Yeah, that electromagnetic weapon magnetized Akihabara. If this kept up, even after eliminating the massive weapon,, I don’t know whether we can repair it.”

So…

“We intend to follow this idiot’s idea–throw that massive weapon down into a pot to cook it. The pot is Akihabara, and the heat–probably 2,000 degrees.”

Upon hearing Marie’s words, Houko widened her eyes.

As expected of her smarts, Marie thought.

A mere few words alone allowed to understand their plans.

–They would heat Grid Akihabara until the magnetism faded.

Naoto’s plan was to wipe out the massive weapon and remove the magnetism from Grid Akihabara.

“–”

Marie suddenly recalled.

Back then, at Grid Akihabara, Naoto, who probably did not have any knowledge of electromagnetism back then, said the first words when he talked about how to deal with those people.

–“I’m going to throw those people into a pot and cook them alive’.

Back then, Naoto probably did not realize that heating could remove magnetism.

Throughout it all, this guy has been–

Marie diverted her stare towards Naoto.

Did he realize it–or did he not care about it in the first place?

Naoto was lying down, relaxing–and RyuZU, caressing his hair, suddenly mentioned,

“Master Naoto…I really do apologize.”

–She apologized?

That RyuZU actually apologized so sincerely?

Marie was dumbfounded, her fingers nearly typing the wrong controls.

Naoto too was dumbfounded, his eyes widened as he said,

“RyuZU?”

“It is because I was unable to remove the magnetism by myself–that your hand and shoulder bear the fate of the planet, Master Naoto…”

The catkin-like hands were quietly touching Naoto’s hand and shoulder.

Those were the scalded parts on Naoto when he carried the sizzling hot RyuZU.

It was thanks to nanomachines that the wound did not become pus. However, it was still so swollen, and one would feel heartbroken just looking at him.

Marie too was worried about Naoto’s burn.

It would probably take about another week before there was no more of that stinging pain, but whether the nervous system and delicate touch most important to a technician could recover…

Without looking at the healing process of the wound, it would be impossible to comment on that aspect alone.

In fact–Marie did not grumble even though Naoto was lazing away in such a situation, for Naoto did do a lot on his part–she had to let him rest.

“–”

Feeling what felt like setbacks over the past few days, Marie was sighing as she thought about it.

She recalled the first time when she met Naoto.

That boy, just an ordinary person–full of nonsense.

While that weapon’s electromagnetic weapon caused Marie to be almost, completely dejected, that boy never once stopped in his tracks, always doing the most suitable thing.

–Yes, the most suitable action.

And he never seemed to be bothered about the price he had to pay for his actions.

Even though the city was magnetized, and all technology was rendered ineffective; for Marie–the one most trustworthy to her was Halter–but for Naoto, it was RyuZU, so much more important than his own life, who broke down.

In such a peril, he continued with his instincts of ‘doing this’, creating RyuZU while she was so hot the heat could melt the floor.

Without any rest, he escaped Akihabara, leaving behind Marie, who was dejected, thinking of herself to be at her wits end.

In such a pain, where he felt suicide was a sweet temptation, he encouraged AnchoR too, and went to the streets, looking for a clue to improve the situation–

Was that truly–an ordinary person? An amateur?

What kind of sarcasm was that–Marie gritted her teeth.

–How much am I relying on that ordinary person, amateur’s willpower and strength? And anyway, what have I been doing? Without Naoto dragging me along, I’ll probably be drifting in Akihabara, unable to move.

And moresoever–

“It’s alright knowing that you’re alright, RyuZU. This is a man’s medal now, isn’t it? Haha.”

–Naoto still had his headphones removed at this point.

It was so that he could respond in sudden cases of emergency. His forehead was sweating as he showed a tender smile back at RyuZU.

–Is that a normal person?

You got to be kidding. That's…that is, the one I've always–always–been aiming–

"But since you say so, RyuZU, I'll help myself and make sure that you praise me for my hard work, RyuZU! Basically, I want a reward! More accurately, it's–"

"Yes, Master naoto, you want me to relieve yourself of all the possible twisted sexual desires you have. I understand."

"Wait, that's not it–no, that's not it, oh, yeah…no, now's not the, erm…I-I'll talk about that next time…"

–Upon seeing Naoto gleefully say such lecherous words, Marie hastily stopped her inner monologue.

And Naoto, unable to understand Marie's inner heart, continued on,

"Ahhh! 'Now's not it! Listen to it me, it's about my date with AnchoR–"

"Master Naoto, you certain are an amazing masochist to actually mention such a topic at this moment. I understand. Since you wish to so for some spanking–which part shall it be?"

"Let me finish here, okay!? I-I didn't go out strolling with the intention of leaving my bride behind, so I bought a gift for you~"

"Papa…bought this for me♪"

AnchoR cut off Naoto's words, showing an angelic smile as she said this,

At the same, she opened her palms in front of RyuZu.

Her finger was wearing something shiny–a ring.

"–Master Naoto? I am a little bewildered as to the kind of masochistic play you wish to play, that this is why you are treating me so cruelly, no?"

"Please keep those scythes back, I beg of you! Look, that's the right middle finger!"

Upon hearing Naoto shriek, RyuZU stared at the ring.

With a treasuring attitude, AnchoR stared at the ring cheerfully.

“…It’s something I bought out of my own will…a little spell..papa…made this for me.”

“I think it also has the meaning of avoiding evil, something like a talisman. This is something I bought to commerate going out with AnchoR when I wanted to buy something for you, RyuZU. That’s what the shop attendant said when I asked—but I thought I should personally make one—so…”

RyuZU looked perplexed as she tilted her head.

Naoto beamed as he took out a little box from his pocket, opening it in front of her.

Inside the box was a **ring** gittering silver.

“Since it’s a reward…don’t ask the meaning of that, and show me your ring finger, okay?”

“…”

“It doesn’t mean anything until I put it on too. So don’t mind–is that alright?”

RyuZU did not answer, and her expression did not change.

She merely nodded, reaching her left hand out.

Naoto smiled happily. Perhaps he heard some miniscule change within RyuZU’s body which Marie’s ears could not hear.

“Thank you, RyuZU.”

Naoto slipped a ring on the girl’s left ring finger.

“If it is this level of service, I do intend to repay your excessive concern for me, Master Naoto…though I am unwilling.”

It was opposite of RyuZU’s own words, and she embraced the ring that was slipped onto her finger.

Got to add on, Marie thought.

Till this point, everything Naoto did, and beyond–probably during the time Marie spent repairing RyuZU, replacing parts for Vermouth, preparing installation work of Halter.

Even during that time, when he had nothing to do–he made a ring.

Marie lowered her eyes, and her lips inadvertently let slip.

"–What kind of an ordinary person is that? How is there possibly an ordinary person like you–really."

Houko heard the conversation between the boy and the automata.

It was a confirmation of love, something that had been repeated billions of times on this planet.

Houko did not know what it meant to truly love an automata.

All she knew was that this boy was serious, and that this automata knew how to reciprocate those feelings.

Those were the only two things she understood.

…However, it was insufficient. She had to know more about this boy.

And while driven by those thoughts, Houko quietly spoke up,

"–Excuse me, but may I talk to you?"

"Eh? Ah, okay…"

The boy lifted his face in shock. He was rude, but it was obvious that he was tense. It seemed that he was not used to the idea of others speaking to him.

Houko smiled.

"My name is Houko. Master Naoto Miura, I suppose? May I call you Master Naoto?"

"–Ah, yes, please go ahead."

“Thank you very much. Pardon my rudeness, but may you answer two questions of mine?”

“E-eh, what’s the questions about?”

“Master Naoto, your treasured automata were damaged–and you wanted to deal with that weapon for revenge, no?”

Upon hearing that, the boy–Naoto was taken aback.

“Eh, revenge?–…no, that’s not it. They did something infuriatingly shitty to AnchoR, and even hurt RyuZU, so I want them to pay. I guess that’s it?”

“Pay…is that not what they call revenge?”

Houko reaffirmed, and Naoto gave a conflicted expression.

“No, I’ll say that it’s just to put an end to it…no, that’s not it, I don’t like it. As for what I don’t like, it’s complicated to say–whatever, that’s bascially it, simply–”

He paused,

“I’ll make them pay for what they owe–that’s just it, Princess.”

Naoto gingerly used some formal language, and Houko tilted her head slightly.

“Pay…is that so?”

“Hmm…well, I don’t really know how to explain…”

Naoto tapped his forehead, saying,

“It’s weird to enter a restaurant and eat without paying, right? If you can’t pay, don’t order it! Don’t you feel that’s the case?”

“…So you mean that if you buy it, you should pay, is that it?”

“Yeah yeah yeah, that’s right. That’s the kind of feeling.”

Naoto showed an earnest smile as he said that.

Houko nodded, and answered,

“Thank you for your answer. Now for the second question–with a talent like yours, if you want to simply wipe out Akihabara, would you not have done so a

long time ago?”

“Eh–?”

Upon hearing Houko’s words, Naoto widened his eyes.

“Since your aim is to get rid of that weapon, it should be faster for you to simply get rid of the whole of Akihabara discreetly. There is no need for this risk, and it will be simpler for you, no?”

“Eh–” Naoto pondered with a perturbed look.

“But I heard that it will get the whole of Tokyo involved…right?”

“Yes. As you have said, Mr Naoto, once Akihabara is gone, the whole capital will collapse, merely a matter of time–but, what about it?”

The straightforward words caused Naoto to be dumbfounded.

Houko gave a stern look, continuing,

“As far as I can tell, you appear to be someone unscrupulous, but you chose not to use the most effective method for your aim–why is that?”

However, Naoto appeared to be really bewildered as he tilted his head, answering,

“…Eh, other than those related to that weapon, it has ‘nothing to do’ with the rest, right?”

“–”

I see, Houko understood.

I said to make them pay the price.

In other words, that excluded the ones who did not have to pay.

But that also meant that he would not hesitant in paying the price.

Thus, he understood very well. At this point, he had no reason to kill anyone.

It was not simply because he respected the value of a human life.

And not that he considered that it would affect Japan.

He merely wanted payback for those who hurt those dear to him. He was mentally prepared to pay all the price for that.

That alone–was all.

I see, Houko thought.

–If I want to become his friend, there is nobody more trustworthy than him.

–But if I want to be enemies against him, I have to be mentally prepared to bear the risk of sinking with the country.

Houko smiled, and nodded.

“I understand now. I suppose you are really someone who cannot be trusted, Mr Naoto.”

“Ehhh!? You decided that based on what I said!? Did I say something strange!?”

Yes, he could not be trusted.

As long as that boy felt that it was the necessary ‘price’, he probably would sink tokyo without hesitation.

At the very least, he had the ability and will to do such a thing.

It was extremely risky to leave such a person unrestrained–but…

With a smile on her face, Houko noted heartily,

“However–I do understand very well why Marie trusts you.”

“–Huh!?”

“Wai, what are you saying, Houko!?”

Naoto was dumbfounded, and Houko’s close friend–Marie, yelled in a panic.

Houko ignored Marie’s yell, and with a firm belief, she said,

“You are a ‘fair’ person.”

Or, Houko thought,

–Perhaps this boy was very greedy, self-centered.

But at the same time, extremely ‘fair’. Houko believed.

He disagreed with the idea of ‘unfair’, and did not allow for injustice.

He would never think of desiring something, and not paying for it.

This boy would demand this from everyone, including himself, to pay for whatever he wants.

It was likely the idea of ‘unfair’, to earn without paying for it never did cross his mind.

If there was something he wanted, no matter what it was, no matter how, he would pay the price.

Simply put, it was whether he could ‘accept it’, or not.

By comparing it to his desires, if he could ‘accept’, he would pay the price without hesitation.

He was probably this kind of a person.

No matter whether it was his own life–or others.

And because of this–Houko thought.

I should not get involved with this boy and my close friend.

No matter the personal reasons, ‘Houko’ as to the public would certainly be thinking in her mind on how to manipulate them.

If not–if Houko wanted to abide by her ‘fairness’.

Though his power was certainly alluring…

Suddenly, the automata–RyuZU said,

"…To be honest, I am truly amazed. I never did dream that someone amongst humanity, other than Master Naoto, would not be so blind."

Upon hearing those impudent words that did not sound like praise in any means, Houko giggled,

"Why thank you, I am honored that the Great 'Y's masterpiece said this. It appears that I do have some value after all."

RyuZU continued,

"Master Houko…I suppose? May I say a few words?"

"Certainly, what is it?"

"Please allow me to advise you–I suppose you should choose your friends wisely. Honestly put, I do feel that a mere Master Marie does not go well with you."

"S-seriously, you–"

The close friend kicked up a fuss, saying,

However, Houko merely raised a hand to stop Marie, smiling at RyuZu,

"Then, Miss RyuZU, I too shall give you an advise–I do not know the reason for that, but by being stubborn to admit one's outstanding qualities just because you do not like her, you will be belittling yourself, and your master's honor too, you know…?"

"_"

Houko's words dented RyuZU's momentum.

RyuZU spoke up, wanting to say something, but went silent, lowered her eyes, and nodded in a gaudy manner.

"…I shall reflect on this advice."

Seeing RyuZU's reaction, both Naoto and Marie widened their eyes.

All they had was the same one thought.

And it was–'that RyuZU actually backed down…!?'.

Well, Naoto said.

“Marie…uncle Halter keeps calling you Milady here and there, but,”

“–What?”

“Well, I guess the real princess is full of personal charms, you know…? Sure feels like she’s of a completely different level.”

“Huh?” Marie continued on with a vicious smile,

“–What are you getting at? Do you mind getting to the specifics, young Naoto?”

“The head face chest height royal attitude–I can continue listing examples if you want to know.”

“You guysss!!!!!”

RyuZU blankly responded, triggering Marie’s rage.

Houko in turn held in her laughter as she watched this scene.

“Recharging is almost at the targeted 82%…!”

The communications officer’s agitated voice rang.

Gennai nodded nonchalantly,

“…My lord, is it time for you to tell everyone what you intend to do exactly?”

The lieutenant standing next to him asked uneasily.

Gennai glanced at this lieutenant, but did not answer, instead probing back,

“…What do you think of this world?”

“Yes…? Yo-your question is?”

“The Clockwork Planet–the actual thing is right in front of our eyes, actually spinning, but–even after a thousand years, humans still can’t analyse it, let alone replicate it; it was made with that kind of technology…an artificial world.”

Gennai sighed.

“Do you think this can be deemed as ‘science’?”

The lieutenant gave a skeptical look upon hearing this question, aying,

“It is true that there is still a whole lot of mysteries surrounding the gear technology running the planet’s operations…but since that involves reality, by that reasoning, it is ‘science’, ‘technology’…?”

“Such an understanding is pertinent, too fitting. Nobody understands the theory of this thing, ‘it’s beyond our understanding, but since we have it, let’s use it’–I suppose this is science. But do you know?”

“My lord…?”

Gennai showed a cynical sneer, saying to the skeptical lieutenant.

“30,000 years have passed since humanity obtained ‘fire’. However, the actual form of it was determined to be a kind of plasma–a form of electricity, less than a hundred years before the planet was reconstructed. This means that humanity used fire for 28,928 years without understanding this natural phenomenon. It is scientific, no? But have you realized? There is a ‘significant difference’ between these two, and that is–”

Gennai paused,

“–This Clockwork Planet is not a natural creation. It is ‘artificial’.”

“This…”

“Yes, this universe is created by some God–or some God named ‘coincidence’. By revealing God’s laws, and using them, now that is technology, theory, induction, logic! Now then, shall I ask? This ‘artificial being’…on what ‘science’ is it created based on?”

In the face of Gennai’s question, this seemingly correcting tone, the lieutenant inadvertently retreated,

“Bu-but…it is very true that the one who created this planet is ‘Y’.”

“That is the case. And because of that, I conclude that ‘Y’ is not human.”

Gennai, who said those words, obviously lost it–no,

Upon seeing Gennai’s crazed eyes, the lieutenant gulped. However, Gennai did not mind, saying,

‘That thing–‘Y’ created the blueprint based on ‘a theory that did not exist’! Super

technology? Unknown technology? A technology that a genius created, and even after a thousand years, nobody can understand? It will be believable if we say that it was based on prehistoric civilization technology or done by aliens…but I do not have the preference for such fantasies, and will not believe in them."

–It was understandable if it was an analysis of the unknown nature.

That was the science humanity had been building upon.

…But analysing the theory of the artificial under their feet?

That was illogical. The order was 'reversed', turned on its head. In that case, it meant that there was a blueprint, that someone knew of a theory nobody knew of! –Now then, lieutenant, let me hear your

–Such a thing definitely was not science.

'Y' was said to have created such a thing, but where exactly did he derive that theory from?

Gennai then knew.

That automata called AnchoR had a function–the 'Perpetual Gear'.

Perpetual? Impossible! Technology? Don't mess me with!

That is a law that can't possibly exist–defying the laws of this universe.

Some time passed. All the people in the room had their attention on him.

Skeptical, flustered, perturbed–stares that might be filled with some fear.

In the face of these stares, Gennai roared, his tone filled with anger,

"We spent a thousand years understanding this Clockwork Planet, and yet now, we don't understand it entirely. There are so many functions that even theories and logic have yet to solve! –Now then, lieutenant, let me hear your opinion."

"My lord…"

"–Where exactly did 'Y' create the theory of this installation that humanity has

yet to understand even after 1,000 years?”

There was none who could answer.

This silence caused Gennai to recall the same question he tossed out a few days ago.

…–

31 years ago, the government commissioned the research to fuse clockwork and electromagnetic technology, and Gennai learned something.

Humanity of the past..though incomplete, they were about to unravel this world, the partial veil of this universe.

Humanity of the past tried to define the universe through the electromagnetic theories they researched on.

–But all that was for naught.

Everything changed on the day the existence called ‘Y’ modified the world into the Clockwork Planet.

And to wipe off the evidence, they rid his footing–eliminating everything.

All theories were toppled from its origina.

And he understood, more than anyone else.

That the ones who kept rewriting and reassembling this world was humanity.

But despite being able to change the world, humanity would not change.

The ironic thing was that–even ‘Y’ could not change humanity.

On that case, Gennai had a firm belief inside that collapsed Shiga Core Tower.

–‘Y’ was not human.

Humans could never change, and would never change. But only that person–toppled over all premises, and arrogantly overturned the world. That was impossible to do based on human hands.

If that was the case, he could accept it. Puny humans were obviously powerless against Gods, demons or monsters beyond human intelligence that could change the world.

In this reality he saw, Gennai led his subordinates so that he could live.

Even if defying God was a sin, he could not let puny ‘humans’ be destroyed with a mere whimper.

They controlled Mie, continued their research, and finally completed the electromagnetic weapon that could destroy the world.

And again, Gennai felt despair.

For he understood.

No matter whether it was he, this weapon, or his comrades seeking revenge, they were merely existences that were to be expected.

No matter whether they had realized it, the results were all in ‘Y’s hands. How foolish…

–And, finally disgusted with that, Gennai retreated into a hermit life.

Yes, they were ultimately ordinary humans, unable to defy against those who surpass us. Thu–

Having felt disappointed in history itself, he despaired at the world, and felt that he was fine with ending his life now that he had seen reality.

Until he saw that boy–with that ‘Y’ automata along.

“I shall do so, if you are willing to hear some words from an old man.”

A few days ago, Gennai said such words,

At his residence deep in the basement of Grid Mie, where he decided to spend his last days, an Initial-Y unit suddenly appeared.

And unlike Unit 4, it was someone he could talk with.

Gennai recalled the ‘Judgment Day’ mentioned in ancient legends.

It was said that when the world ends, God would appear before humanity, hearing their doubts–or excuses.

And so, he would be able to hear God's answers–with such little expectations, Gennai raised his doubts.

The Clockwork Planet that was yet to be fully discovered, 'Y', who created this world.

That mystery was–where did 'Y' come from?

Was he or she a God? Or Human?

Are we living in a fantasy–or actually living on this planet?

However…

"I do wish of you to return me the precious time I spent with you. Is that all with your foolish questions?"

The automata refused to answer Gennai's doubts."

"I shall ask of you not to lament your misfortune of having a brain inferior to a speck of dust–no, I do not pity you, but 'naming something you cannot understand' as God out of laziness is a natural thinking of a common peasant. For you, 'Y' is a 'great' worth exalting as a God. To add on, mixing up reality and fantasy proves that you cannot understand the logic behind things, and I do advise you to hurry and accept treatment."

Upon hearing the automata's smile as she replied with disdain–

"–Are you kidding?"

The metallic eyes on Gennai's wrinkled face showed a vicious glare, and he retorted,

"A foolish question, you say? It has been 1,000 years since 'Y' recreated this planet, and till now, humanity is yet to solve this technology…!"

"That does appear to be the case. I suppose I can see the 'I don't believe this' look on that man's face."

"In so many years…how many scholars, technicians spent their lives trying to attain the truth! I may not be as successful as my predecessors, but I am also one. Humans gave up their lives trying to unravel God's throne–and failed. Are you going to mock this act of mine?"

"–No, I do have to applaud you for that effort."

The automata's words left Gennai speechless.

"But as you have said–you are a failure."

"Yes, that is right. I assumed in the past that I took a step forward, but in the end, it is–"

However, the automata cut off his words, coldly telling him,

"You were 'finished' at that moment–this rare appraisal of hard work is for naught now…"

Upon seeing the automata unwilling to give an answer, Gennai suddenly got up from his chair,

"Answer me–what was 'Y' thinking when he recreated the world!? Why did he throw at us such–a similar thing that is beyond our thoughts, vauggue, something nobody can understand!"

"–This old man is so noisy…"

The one answering was not the automata.

Naoto, who had been unconscious till this while and lying on the bed, was glaring at him,

"Master Naoto."

The automata girl warned the boy,

"It is better for you to rest a little longer…I will ask for this old man to prepare an elevator–"

"Forget about it, RyuZU."

The boy slowly got up, shaking his head, saying,

"…I heard your conversation. It's a waste of time to continue talking. Let's ignore this guy for now and find a way to get back up."

At this moment, Gennai spoke up harshly.

"It is impossible. The elevator will not be powered on electricity unless on my orders."

“Powered on electricity? What’s that…well, just give the order. We got no time to waste here.”

‘I’m not done here–!”

Gennai’s tone harshened, and the boy scowled.

Then, he said impatiently,

“Seriously, old man, I’m pissed off because of what happened with AnchoR, and I’m now busy! If you don’t hurry up and activate the elevator, I’ll–”

“–You’ll kill me?”

Gennai retorted defiantly.

This was the last fight the old man would say to the arrogant youngster, a protest of the question he risked his life on being dismissed as something an old man would do to spend the time.

However, the boy merely looked flabbergasted.

“–Huh? Have you lost it, old man? Will the elevator move if I kill you? If you don’t activate it, I’ll”

The boy’s eyes showed no doubt as he said convincingly,

“‘Climb up using my own strength’. That’s what an elevator means, right? If there’s a cable leading up there, I’ll be able to climb up there.”

The boy was able to pinpoint the location of the elevator–and even reveal the structure acurately. Gennai was silent.

At the same time, he recalled that the boy was the owner of this Initial-Y series unit.

‘Y’s inheritance; the latest myth, God’s own automata.

Gennai knew that they existed, and saw the activation of unit 04.

However, the one in front of him was not any other unit, but the ‘1st unit’–YD 01 ‘RyuZU’.

Nobody in the past had managed to break through that unit’s master identification, and having recalled that, Gennai realized,

"–Boy."

'I asked the wrong person'–he faced the boy again.

He said,

"I shall ask you a question. Depending on your answer, I may activate the elevator."

The boy wordlessly turned around.

Gennai stared at those light grey eyes, asking,

"–Do you have no doubts about this world, this world of endless despair that humanity had, and will continue to challenge?"

On this unknown planet, in this vague, illogical planet.

Do you not have any doubts–this was the question.

And then, Gennai was forced to face this reality he did not want to know.

It was something beyond his imagination, merciless, illogical, simple, and foolish–answer.

His heart was so devoid of hope he thought he had none, yet he felt despair for the 3rd time.

That boy was undoubtedly just a normal human, or so he appeared to be, saying human speech, acting like a human.

And then, he dared to act so nonchalant, as though 'he had completely understood Gennai's despair', directing his response not at anyone else, but at Gennai.

"–It's your choice to say that you're a failure and grumble about it, but…"

The grey eyes were filled with condescendence as the boy said,

"You're being too cocky, old man. Who do you think you are, being a 'representative' of humanity'?"

"–"

“Don’t lump me along with you.”

–Unlike you who have given up, we didn’t despair’.

Right–the boy described ‘what is a human’.

Gennai remained speechless, and he sat down.

He exerted his weight on the chair, rocking it–and he exhaled deeply, nodding,

“…Fine. I shall contact them and activate the elevator.”

Gennai said, and the boy’s expression immediately changed.

“Oh? Why old~man~! You’re really reasonable! Right, RyuZU, let’s go!”

“Please wait, Master Naoto. You will faint due to lack of oxygen if you run.”

The boy and automata dashed out of his home in a rush.

With a grim look, Gennai watched that back, pondering alone,

How laughable–that person, that boy clearly, blatantly, in an enlightened manner, saw the ‘center of the illusion’ shrouding humans with his eyes, and boldly said ‘why can’t you see this’.

–I see, he may have the form of a human.

–Many have said that God created Man out of his own image.

However, that genius who appeared human–no, an abnormality, radical, superhuman, God or demon–was nonchalantly saying that.

Despite not being human, he boldly described what was a human without a doubt.

Gennai chuckled ominously.

The target of his hatred, almost on mania, appeared in front of him.

The arrogant, foolish God fooled humanity. In that case–

“–We shall meet again, boy. No…”

‘Y’ (That monster)–impersonating a human.

–…

A sharp beep rang.

The monitor on the wall changed, flickering.

Gennai pulled back his consciousness from the past, saying to the communications officer.

“–What is the matter, report.”

“Ah…y-yes. Recharge at 82%….”

“Good work.”

Gennai nodded, and stood up.

He slowly looked around the command room, at the faces of his subordinates who were serving him.

They were his old subordinates, who were with him since the research in Grid Shiga; or the sons of his allies who raised them in Mie.

Gennai, without a kin or home, viewed these people as his ‘family

–*Well, whatever* Gennai thought.

Since the planet we are standing on is unstable to begin with…

Everything…is merely some ordinary, fleeting illusion.

–If you are really God, you may kill me off.

But if ‘Y’ is merely a person lying, bluffing humanity.

I want you to know the limits of us ordinary people–the definite limits of humanity.

I want you to know your sins, for you denied absolutes, rebuilt the world, and stagnated humanity for a thousand years.

And then, you shall see everything, and die in your despair.

With such fury and hatred, Gennai declared,

“Good work, everyone. Now then–I shall ‘give instructions’.

And then, a high pressure electric current that could easily turn human bodies into ash ran amok in the command room.

Naoto suddenly got up like a spring.

His eyes were widened to their limits, sweating profusely.

“Master Naoto…?”

“Wait, Naoto, what’s with you?”

Both RyuZU and Marie stared at Naoto skeptically. AnchoR, resting on his belly, too looked up in shock.

But this was not the moment to be bothered with it.

Naoto heared something dangerous.

His eardrums, his instincts, no, all his senses captured the greatest siren alert.

It was not merely the matter of a life threatening moment, but something more terrifying than that. It was something he never heard before–no, correction, he did hear before!

“Wait…you got to be kidding–!?”

How can I forget? His rage was boiling.

I get to hear this ugly, indecent, unpleasant sound again.

“What’s wrong now, Naoto? After a little while, the Bypass will–”

“Marie!!!”

Naoto shrieked, his teeth gnashing.

“Get everyone out to the South right now! To where the clouds are! Hurry!”

Perhaps she saw something from that face–

"–Everyone! 20th Outside team, head to your 6! Begin weather manipulation!"

–She yelled while leaving aside her doubt and questions, and began operating the control panel at her hands.

Then, Naoto sensed the mechanical operation sounds of the 'Heaven's Pillar' interfering with the external temperature and humidity.

The winds were trembling, the air pressure changed drastically, creating a massive amount of steam–but…

"Shiiittt! We can't make it! Everyone runn!!!!"

Naoto's holler echoed through the massive floor.

And then, 5 seconds later.

–The light of destruction came, blowing away everything in its path.

Chapter 4 – 07:35 – Progressor

An explosive light from the bottom from the city permeated through the 'Heaven's Pillar', entering the sky.

Karasawa saw this scene from the roof of the ruling party's headquarters, stroking his chin in shock.

"–Woah, I didn't make it…"

He stole some records from the terminals of the ruling government party, and through the logs, he affirmed a certain fact.

And right when he was about to contact Marie and the others and report on this–this happened.

"This is bad…my commission as a consultant isn't worth it now."

I'm someone who won't work without being paid–with a bitter expression, Karasawa held onto the terminal in his hand.

His back was leaning on the metal fence on the roof, and he exhaled hard.

–I should have realized it.

According to Professor Marie's report, those guys illegally transported an Initial-Y unit'.

Those guys are researchers on electromagnetic technology, so why didn't they use that technology on that thing? I should have realized it.

Also, this report–

"It's too risky for me to handle this intel alone…"

"The Shiga 'military', the communication logs of the mole in the government–they were deliberately encrypted, but he spent an hour and so to decrypt it, which he had to laud himself for. However…

At this point, he might prefer not to know about it.

“No matter whether the coup d’etat succeeds or not, ‘the mastermind’ behind them have the same aim–to cause the ‘Capital Circle’ to collapse–now what do I do…”

Right when Karasawa was dripping in cold sweat and muttering to himself–

“–…”

He wordlessly drew his back from the metal fence.

He was not taken aback.

He predicted that events would turn out this way the moment he obtained this intel.

He wanted to inform Marie before that happened–his benefactor, Professor Marie, however…

“They’re showing up immediately…seriously, for some bad guys, they’re so capable. It’s killing me.”

Karasawa said, and sighed.

He looked aside.

He saw a person–no, someone appear on the roof.

The opponent was in stealth mode, but it was possible to at least see it if one paid attention. There was something steam-like there.

–Optical camouflage.

“And at a size that can be for personal use…? Hey hey, I can conclude as a consultant that not even the ‘5 Enterprises’ managed to develop this successfully, you know?”

Karasawa’s eyes and lips showed a smile, tilting his head in confusion.

He then raised his voice heartily, saying,

“Is it okay if you tell me? –How much is your pay?”

The pile of steam did not answer.

I guess so, Karasawa gave a wry smile.

Those people were not the type to mess around and say ‘any last words’, ‘what have you obtained’, ‘say your prayers’.

If they were just as stated in the intel obtained, they would have known that Karasawa had no last words, knew what he obtained, and that he was an atheist.

In the face of this killing intent closing in, Karasawa slowly undid the button on his collar.

He moved his right foot back, and got into a fighting pose.

“Alright, let’s do each other’s work. Do you know that in this country? Not doing extra is not considered to be doing work.”

Viva laborers–Karasawa muttered sarcastically as he faced this enemy in front of him.

The enemy was probably a full cyborg with the latest equipment, and perhaps the one inside was a professional. On the other hand, he was merely a consultant, armed only with a handgun and some tools.

–*How many seconds can he survive?*

Sighing hard, Karasawa stepped up to challenge this overtime that was a matter of life and death.

–*What happened?*

Marie gave a blank stare at the scene in front of her, so stunned she was gasping for breathing.

–*Everything vanished.*

The sudden burst of light devoured everything, melting, vanquishing.

The Core Installation made of extremely sturdy materials was melted like Amezaiku.

The floor, walls and ceiling were punctured with a massive, round hole.

The light shot through the outer walls, melted the floor, vaporized the structure, and shot through to the outer wall on the other side.

The light created this hole, and at the same time, left behind an ugly melting scar.

Marie fell limp.

If she was a second later, she would have been vaporized by that light too.

With a trembling stare, she looked around, finding Houko beside her, the ‘Black Tortoise’ Halter was controlling at the wall, and Vermouth by the feet of that massive body.

Naoto, who was in the safety zone with RyuZU and AnchoR, remained unscathed.

The maintenance automata were no longer to be seen. They were already working in the epicenter, unable to escape.

–But at the very least, it doesn’t look like any human was caught in the blast.

Having understood this, a doubt appeared in Marie’s consciousness.

With a quivering voice, she raised her doubt,

“–Wh-what happened!?”

This yell echoed towards the empty, massive hole, gradually fading away.

Nobody answered–no,

“…We got bombarded.”

Naoto was the only one to answer her, with a mutter,

“What did you say?”

–I can’t understand? By whom? By what? For what reason?

Marie’s thoughts started to swirl erratically, and Naoto again affirmed–this time, with a loud voice.

“It’s that damn bigass thing ‘main cannon’ that blew a hole through Akihabara! We were hit! Do you here me!?”

She heard that, or at the very least, she could understand what Naoto was saying, but–

Marie yelled back, dumbfounded,

"–Why!? Why are we bombarded!? Those guys are aiming for a coup d'etat, right!? If any harm is to come to Houko–the Royal Family, their purpose will be for nothing, right!? No, more important–!"

Marie immediately leapt to her feet, flailing her arms.

"If they destroy the 'Heaven's Pillar, Tokyo, Japan will end up sinking if it gets too bad! Those guys too will…!"

This would not be a coup d'etat.

It was simply a terrorist attack–no, the worst form of it, a 'suicide terrorist act'.

It was different from the initial premise, different from before. She could not understand the significance of this action–

However, it seemed even Naoto could not explain her doubt at this point, as the winds blew through the massive hole, engulfing the scene–and at this moment…

"–Spraying steam can weaken the directional power of the microwaves. Such a suitable countermeasure that vexes me. However, I do hope that you tell me, how do you know this main cannon is a 'Microwave Mega Cannon'?"

The deep, steely voice of a man echoed in the level.

Where

–Where did that come from?

This voice did not come from a speaker, and neither was it heard directly.

Marie looked around, trying to answer her own doubt. Then, she realized,

The entire floor was resonating, spreading the voice.

Before anyone could react, that voice continued on calmly,

"I suppose you are still alive, right? 'Y'–, no, I remember, young Naoto Miura."

Everyone, beside RyuZU, turned to focus their eyes on Naoto.

The only two who had an impression of that voice–Naoto and RyuZU, looked down from the hole that was blown through the floor.

There was the massive weapon, looking like a little dot in Grid Akihabara.

"–This voice…is it the old man from that time…!?"

Naoto muttered, and Marie jumped up, yelling,

"Naoto! What's going on? Explain! What's with that microwave mega cannon!? Whose voice is that?"

But Naoto could not answer. He did not answer.

"Like hell I know!? Mirco–what is that!?"

"–When we fell to the deep basement the last time, we did meet an old man who assumed himself to be a hermit and lost to life. I suppose that is his voice–but here is the question. Why do we hear that annoying voice again?"

RyuZU muttered as she recalled, perplexed.

"…No, since it is you, I suppose you would have blocked it 'without knowing'. There used to be an installation called a microwave, and this uses the theory behind it–this sound too uses the wall to resonate through the power of electromagnetic waves. I do apologize for rattling on by myself."

The robotic voice continued to ignore the dumbfounded group, and said,

"Oh yes, I have yet to introduce myself–I am Gennai Hirayama, the leader of this coup d'etat. Now, you must be thinking, why attack the 'Heaven's Pillar'?"

"Gennai…Hirayama…"

Marie remembered this name well, nodding.

Yes, even if he did so, it would merely be leading them to a path of self-destruction…

"I shall keep it brief that. To be honest, regarding this coup d'etat…the outcome does not matter to me. The **executed** subordinates however were utterly fuming at the injustice however."

–Does not matter?

No, more importantly. What's with the 'executed'?

While new doubts appeared in Marie's mind, the owner of the voice–Gennai, continued on,

"–We wanted to show this narrow-minded world that only recognized gear technology, the results of our research–how outstanding this electromagnetic technology is. After that, we would correct the government that abandoned us like rubbish. This basically was the purpose of our mission, but…"

Gennai paused, and then continued,

"I knew it would fail."

"–!"

"Or rather, I would say that the premise is not there. The world has already admitted to how amazing electromagnetism is. Why would any country abandon such a useful technology and appear to abide by International Treaties. You would not have believed, right?"

That's true. Marie thought.

Japan, so timid in diplomatic relations, was researching on electromagnetic technology.

Anyone would be able to find one or two secret research labs in any country, if they were willing to look…

"Next, to take down the government–this itself is an easy objective to accomplish, but once our electromagnetic weapon is revealed, all that awaits us is a world war."

Yes, the other countries would not ignore such an obvious threat.

They would try to eliminate it at any cost. At the very least, they would try to have measures to counter, even if they had to use their secret electromagnetic technology.

"Well, those subordinates seem to think that with this weapon and electromagnetic technology, we should be able to fight on par against other countries. This youthful enthusiasm is truly terrifying. The past me would not be able to allow myself to go along with my subordinates, so I retreat to the underground and live on–however…""

There was a change in tone,

“Over there, I realized–far beyond the structure of this country, more importantly than the loss of human lives–is this arrogant being. I realized that this world is straying off course!”

The deep, booming voice sounded agitated for the first time,

“–I shall go straight to the point. Naoto Miura–no, ‘Y’.”

Naoto lifted his face.

The grey eyes of inexplicable intent looked into the space.

“–You have arrogantly modified the world, denying every step humanity had made in the past, insisting that your view is the right one, and contorted this world–in that case, I shall ask you again.”

Marie could not understand what Gennai was talking about.

But she could sense intense fury, hatred from that voice–and his hidden view.

“–Stop me if you can. If you can, you aren’t human. If you can’t, you shall regret that you contorted this world with impudence and arrogance, and sink to the depths of Hell. You shall know the will of us ordinary humans–you monster.”

–Silence descended.

The voice vanished.

While everyone was looking dazed, Halter first broke the silence, tilting the head of the potent ‘Black Tortoise’, saying,

“–So, Naoto, what kind of joke is this?”

Vermouth then spoke,

“I say, kid. Wha-what kind of a wretched thing did you say to anger him like this? Mind sharing a bit for future reference?”

And Naoto, being questioned, showed a perturbed expression, shaking his head, saying,

“Ah, no…? I just answered what he said…did I say something weird back then, RyuZU?”

“No, Master Naoto, you merely mentioned some simple logic. The problem here is, why did he go berserk…is it due to dementia?”

The overly dire situation, coupled with the relaxed atmosphere, caused Marie to raise her voice, yelling,

“So Asia’s going to sink because of someone’s dementia–!? You got to be kidding! Anyway, Naoto!”

Marie pointed at Naoto fervently,

“What right do you have to call me a landmine of a girl!? Didn’t you just step on one unprecedented one!?”

“No, well, even if you say so, it’s impossible for me to spot the landmine of that ridiculous old man! That guy’s already half-crazy at that point.”

“…? Papa, what did that old man say?”

“Eh, AnchoR, it’s fine that you don’t understand~ I guess nobody can either…”

Naoto looked listless as he said that.

At that moment, Marie suddenly felt a chill up her spine.

–Am I thinking too much?

That empty smile, feels like there’s something he can’t get back…

“A-anyway, let’s sort things out here!!”

Marie shook off her fears, trying to sort her thoughts,

“Naoto, how long more until that massive thing fires another one?”

“…I don’t know. But when it was fired…it probably was loaded about 80%. Right now…it’s about 30 or so? Say, I don’t know the actual structure, but I guess it needs to get back to 80% before it can fire another, or maybe even 50!? I don’t have anything to prove after all!”

"…It's fine. Let's just think of the worst case scenario. Assuming that it can fire again at 50%–how long more until then?"

Marie asked, and Naoto cupped his head,

"…I told you I don't know. I already thought it was strange that it's able to reload to more than 80% at that time. I said that it'll take 66 hours for it to reload! Around 46 hours passed then, and there should be a day buffer! But it's beyond my–"

Marie grabbed Naoto by his collar.

The blazing emerald eyes were glaring at the grey eyes.

"Right now, the only things we can rely on are your ears and instincts! Answer me with your instincts! How much longer until the next shot, earliest!"

"–72 minutes. 'No'–sooner than that."

Naoto concluded.

Marie thought,

Since this guy said so, there's no doubt. Without any other guideline, let's use this as the baseline–72 minutes. It's decided. It's confirmed.

That's certainly not a long time.

In this situation, there's no major difference between seven minutes and seven seconds.

Take a deep breath, sorting everything out one by one–

Marie looked towards Halter–the head of the 'Black Tortoise', asking,

"–Halter, how much longer do you think the 'military' will stop watching and deploy troops to suppress them?"

"…I'll say it if you want; they'll attack at any given moment. There's nothing to assure the Princess' safety.

"Argh, seriously! Everyone's just good at dragging everyone else down, right!?"

Marie stomped on the floor.

However, Houko took a step forward, voicing a different voice,

“No, I feel that it will take about 40 minutes…no matter what miracle occurs now, that will be the required time.”

Eh–everyone present turned to look at Houko.

And with everyone’s stare focused on her, Houo continued,

“–When that weapon appeared, the Capital’s Defense Force was wiped out. After that, there was a total of 8 different cases of internal conflicts in Tokyo due to the government’s breakdown, and with the rebels uprising, the 1st to 4th military forces were deployed due to the police’s request to put them down, and were in battle mode. The main rebel forces surrounded the Palace in 2 massive formations, but all of you did wipe them out, no?”

And then–

“Simply put, currently, the Tokyo ‘military’ has lost its fighting ability, not under ordinary command. Assuming that both allied and enemy ‘militaries’ were deployed because of your terrorist attack premonition, they will now have to regroup their fighting forces, strategize, affirm the command structure, and if needed, call for reinforcements–even if there are people with such abilities, will and authority that could quickly gather all these, if I have to estimate based on the time that passed–I suppose 40 minutes will be the limit. However–”

Houko showed a tender smile,

“If such a person does exist, I suppose the situation would not have turned out like this.”

Marie showed no attempt to hide her shock as she stared at Houko.

“–You’re someone with no political power, right?”

“Of course. I am a woman born to the Royal Family after all.”

Houko gave a demure smile.

—*Too bad.* Marie thought.

Houko was able to showcase the ability and will to make such an analysis in such a situation. If she was born in a different era, or perhaps, not born to the Royal Family, she probably would be one capable of leading this country.

"–Right, then let's go along with that understanding."

Marie shook off the thoughts she had at that instant, saying this.

"At the very least, we don't have to wait for 40 minutes until they attack. Just lower the partition wall; Halter and Vermouth alone should be able to fend off the JSDF. Next is…"

The biggest issue.

And because of this, Marie was hesitant as to whether she should touch on this dire topic.

"…So in the next 72 minutes until the main cannon is fired–how do we connect the severed cables and destroy that monstrous thing…I guess?"

That hit from before vaporized all the parts that were nearly connected.

This meant that they had to redo everything. Worse off–

"We're lacking 18 people…haha."

–All she could do was laugh.

There were 18 automata controlled by outstanding Meisters, and including Marie and Conrad, synchronized with Vermouth–the work of 20 people in at least an hour was to be completed again by 2 after such massive devastation.

–Impossible. There has to be a limit to how bad things are now.

No matter how she tried to formulate a plan in her mind, she could not come up with a winning strategy to 'make it'.

But…she had no time to waste on hesitating.

And as the winds whirled in this level that was punctured, Marie asked,

"–Naoto, let's reconnect the cables again! Analyze the structure ag–"

"Hey Marie, do you say what you're saying now?"

Naoto simply laughed blankly, saying,

"–How am I supposed to hear the sound of gears that have vanished?"

Marie gasped.

The petite boy bared a hollow smile as he said that.

One could sense that it was God's declaration of the end of the world–the feeling of 'the end'.

All that was left at the scene were the strange buzzing of the 'Heaven's Pillar' structure, the incoming winds–and…

The sounds of the clock hands tickings engulfing the level–signifying precious time.

Nobody knew what to do, merely remaining silent.

Marie too remained slumped, staring at the clock.

4 minutes had passed.

–10% of the minimum limit they had passed by without a purpose.

Suddenly, Marie thought of something, and muttered,

"…It's not too late. Any way to evacuate the people?"

"I suppose not."

Houko, seated beside her, immediately answered.

"There is no one in command capable of notifying the people to evacuate. Those that reacted quickly would have done so beforehand…it is a question of whether they can be saved."

"…I guess. Knew that."

But I just can't help but ask– Marie sighed.

Naoto, right opposite her, said,

"I say, RyuZU, AnchoR, you can go evacuate first, right?"

“Impossible. I did mention before, Master naoto, that for me, there is no option for me to abandon you. If you did forget, I would say that you have a dire case of short term memory.”

“AnchoR…doesn’t want it too…!”

RyuZU answered without a single hesitation, and AnchoR latched herself onto Naoto, not willing to break away.

The important thing now is that we can’t escape– Marie thought.

Gennai Hirayama fired that cannon, intending to obliterate the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

The damage caused by the first cannon shot was barely minimized to ‘such an extent’ due to Naoto’s instincts–but with so many parts crushed, they could not manipulate the weather, let alone connect the cables. It was impossible for them to block the next shot.

What would happen next?

‘Heaven’s Pillar’–if this tower, befitting of its name was to snap and fall, there would be widespread destruction.

Following that, the Capital Circle would cease function completely, plummeting to the bottom of the planet.

Once the Multiple Grid Tokyo was to collapse, all of Japan, the entirety of East Asia, and sooner or later, this ‘Clockwork Planet’ would be fatally damaged.

No matter where they ran to, they definitely could not escape.

And as for countermeasures they could use…there was none no matter how many times she pondered over it.

Marie’s eyes were droopy, her quivering fingertips touching her lips, and they felt dry, parched. She felt a chilling anxiety, following by fear that numbed her temples. That state was…

Marie realized.

–I’m in despair.

It did not start at this point.

When she first felt that shockwave two days ago–the power that destroyed the

world, she despaired.

Certainly, back then, Marie's heart ceased along with the clockwork technology that were wrecked by the electromagnetic pulse–that was how she understood it.

–I already gave up. I'm just using that 'magic' as my last hope.

Her heart long dead, Marie asked in a prayerful manner,

"–Naoto, I guess AnchoR and RyuZU can't destroy that weapon?"

Naoto answered with a weak voice.

"'Maybe' they can, but they'll definitely be severely damaged–I rather the whole of Asia, or even the world sink than that to happen–that's it."

Naoto scratched his head, showing an expression he never did before, and bit his nails.

–So he understood, Marie thought.

At this rate, it was a matter of time before everyone would be buried along with them, plummeting.

And even so, Naoto could not give an order.

Neither side was willing to abandon. Neither side was willing to save.

…It was to be expected.

For he was simply an ordinary human who would be frustrated, hesitant, and make mistakes.

There certainly was not a convenient 'magic' that could fulfill any wish.

Having understood this easily understood truth at this point, Marie lowered her head.

She could not sight.

At this moment–

"…Papa."

AnchoR suddenly stood up, saying,

"…An order, please–"

Naoto lifted his face, showing a grim look, and immediately shook his head,

"–No. No way! Don't make me repeat myself, please…AnchoR."

"But…if this keeps up…"

"Yeah, I know, I know! So AnchoR, please–use that as your last move. I'll think of something. I'll solve–"

Naoto begged over and over again.

But Marie suddenly noticed a minor change.

AnchoR was shaking all over, taking a step back.

She did not nod, merely staring at Naoto, earnestly saying,

"…I don't want."

"Eh?"

Naoto lifted his head, and in turn, AnchoR lowered it.

"Sorry…papa…I can't follow…that order."

"AnchoR…?"

Naoto muttered, looking dumbfounded.

And then, there came an impact.

AnchoR crushed the atmosphere as she leapt out, quickly spinning around. She jumped into the massive hole on the floor, headed straight do–towards the massive weapon on the other end.

"AnchoR!!!"

But despite hearing the plea to stop, she did not stop. The red and white figure continued to shrink in an instant.

Naoto turned to RyuZU frantically, yelling,

“RyuZU! Get her back right now!”

“…I alone will be insufficient in stopping AnchoR when she starts to take action.”

“In that case…!”

Naoto scratched his head in remorse, groaned, flailed his limbs about, and then, told RyuZU,

“In that case, pass the message to her! Wait for another 46 minutes! Please, I’ll get there before then!”

“–Understood.”

RyuZU bowed elegantly. With a swirl on the hem of her black skirt, she was about to give chase after her little sister, only to stop, and turn around,

“Master Marie, you mind if I say a few words?”

“…M-me?”

Marie looked a little dumbfounded, speechless.

RyuZU certainly was not one who would take the initiative to speak to others.

“I have decided to consider the advice the Princess gave me. I do sincerely believe that it is futile, simply a bleak hope, but I am willing to admit that even if I am a perfect ‘servant’, I am still incomplete, not omnipotent–for my personality amongst the sisters is the most reserved.”

“…Erm, I guess.”

Aren’t you the most arrogant of them all here? Marie wondered as she nodded away.

RyuZU sat demurely, saying,

“Master Marie, I would say that Master Naoto is always look at the ‘limit’ of that pitiful mind of yours. Theory, to be a little radical, is simply a posh looking article to be shared with others and codified arbitrarily. The truth is not universal, and neither is it unchanging, or biased. Because of that, though it is a pity, a fact that I really have find difficult to agree with–”

RyuZU paused, her topaz eyes staring at Marie.

She then said,

"…**You are right. Just as Master Naoto is. At the same time, you are wrong.**"

"Right…and wrong…?"

Marie looked dumbfounded as he repeated what RyuZu said.

…I don't understand what that means.

However, she accepted those words wholeheartedly. She should have given up on thinking, but was driven on by something.

–That was, **who exactly is the one wrong in the first place?**

RyuZU bowed with a nonchalant look.

"Do give your best and ponder with the insufficient brain juices of yours, Master Marie. Now then, I shall be on my way–if you excuse me."

RyuZU then turned elegantly, jumping off, leaping down the hole.

While all those present were unable to move, unable to say a word, Naoto alone silently stood up, declaring,

"Let's get going, Marie."

–*What?*

Marie continued with the thought even she could not grasp, blankly muttering,

"…But what do we do?"

"What else? **Think of something**."

"So I say, what are we going to do!?"

Marie remained seated, not moving at all as she hollered at Naoto.

"Didn't you say it? You can't hear the sounds of gears that vanished, that you can't do anything! You say you'll think of something–but that convenient 'magic' doesn't exist now!?"

"So what!?"

Naoto's growl echoed throughout the level.

"So are we going to give up!? Are you just going to wait for your death like this!? Alright, you want me to admit it!? I'll admit it! I've no idea as to what to do at all!"

Marie was grabbed by Naoto on the collar, and felt difficulty breathing.

The furious grey eyes were glaring back,

"But, hey! If you don't know unless I tell you, I'll make you remember!"

"…What?"

"What kind of woman you around!"

Upon hearing that yell, Marie's shoulders shook instinctively.

Naoto exerted strength on the hand grabbing the shirt, his face contorted due to agitated emotions as he rattled,

"You're–really arrogant, despicably shitty, always thinking that you're high up, yet always talking about your ideals, crying whenever you fail, your heart as soft as tofu, always thinking about difficult things, ruining yourself and dragging others down, the worst kind of a damn landmine girl…!"

–Marie inadvertently regained her usual tone as she muttered,

"You want a fight?"

"But!!"

He paused.

"Nothing is impossible–you're the kind of woman who always thinks that, right?"

Marie widened her eyes.

For an instant, she did not understand the meaning of those words.

But before she could answer, Naoto shook his head impatiently, hollering,

"Argh damn it! Why do I have to say these words now!? Look, Marie, I'm really unhappy about it, but you're a genius, right? I think I can do something so precise

nobody else can do, but fulfilling all that is all about your talent, right?"

"_"

"Whether it was in Kyoto or in Akihabara, it's the same, right? Without your help, I wouldn't be able to repair AnchoR and RyuZU in time, and uncle Halter wouldn't be here! If I have to say it, we wouldn't be able to leave Akihabara, right!?"

"_"

Naoto continued with his spiel of ranting, and in response, Marie stopped thinking.

She blinked. Naoto continued to yell wildly..

"–Tell me, Marie! With that great brain, skills, talent of yours–why did you give up so easily, saying that you can't do it!?"

Inexplicable to her was what she felt from those words–envy and jealousy.

"If you don't want to use it, give it to me! Give me your talent already, alright!?"

Those unbelievable words entered her ears.

–Talent, talent, you say?

This person has a a talent nobody could mimick…an anthentic talent that was magical, god-like, yet he's begging me for talent…?

"…Naoto."

Marie still could not understand, and she reached her hand out to her chest.

Her palm wrapped around Naoto's hand grabbing the shirt, the skin that was burned.

She moved her fingers, touching the surface. Naoto released his hand, her shirt.

"Marie…"

And like an extinguished flame, Naoto lost all enthusiasm.

And then, Marie noticed,

The grey eyes were showing large tears, about to fall at any given moment.

…Ahh.

This is really unbelievable.

…This guy really envies me.

I really can't understand

…He really envies the talent of this useless, weakling in me.

Having understood this fact, Marie felt the heart flare up on her parched, wilted heart.

–And thus, Marie swung her right fist as proof.

"Ack!?"

Pak–! With a highly relieving sound, Naoto's left cheek was spun to the side.

And while he spun to his limit, Marie swung her left hand this time.

Pak–!

And with another highly relieving sound, Naoto's right cheek was spun to the side.

"Phwah!?"

Naoto's cheeks were swollen, and while he remained dumbfounded, Marie grabbed his shirt, standing up.

Then, she kicked him in his defenseless abdomen.

"Ack—!?"

Marie followed up by quickly tripping Naoto's legs while he was bent over, twisting his arms, locking his joints, and holding him down.

"—Wa-wait, timeout! St-stop it you idiot! You're breaking it, you're breaking it, something's coming out!"

Naoto's joints were twisted to the limit as he tapped at the floor, giving up, screaming away.

But Marie ignored that as she lashed out at Naoto,

“Stop coming up with that shitty joke…!! You hear me!?”

Marie felt the temperature rising in her due to agitation, saying,

“You’re the one wasting that ridiculous talent of yours—! If you can’t make use of it, give me those ears!”

If I have senses like this guy, who knows what I can do?

Or—if this guy’s skills are a little better, what will happen?

…Do you think this fine lady here never had such a ridiculous thought in the first place?

Marie yelled with all kinds of complicated emotions within her, and in turn, Naoto yelled back,

“Alright—damn it! If you can do it, I’ll give them to you right now! If this can solve the problem, take them! Or else—!”

Naoto paused.

“Give me your talents—you, think of something! Right now!”

“—U, fine! Wait and see!”

Marie yelled back at Naoto, only for the latter to widen his eyes.

Upon seeing his expression, Marie understood.

The saying went that the ‘grass is greener on the other side’. Just as Marie did to Naoto, Naoto was envious of her. They were envious of each other, wanting each other’s talents.

Marie could not help but find it laughable.

…Ahh! No, stop, stop! I’m not going to brood over this. Fine, it’s over. Everyone worked hard!

Yeah. Thinking about everything from the beginning, it’s strange. Ridiculous.

Why does this noble me have to hope for this idiot, this hopeless pervert, this madman who has a completely different worldview, and get dragged along by him.

No way–it should be the other way around, right?

Everything's infuriating me! It's annoying!

Everything about me and other than me is annoying me!

Argh, the world can just eat shit! Everyone can die! Die!!

Anyway, everyone's just doing whatever they want! You guys are just some shitty lower beings. Don't cause me trouble without my permission! Kneel down! Knowtow!

–So? Erm, where was I?

Marie let go of her hands, releasing Naoto from the grappling hold, and thought.

"–Right, yeah, that's it! I'll tell you how! This–can break through this damned situation!!"

She squealed, gathering the attention of all those present.

It's simple. She thought as she told everyone.

"In other words–if Naoto has my skills, we got a way. You just need to hear out the structure of the remaining gears, and build new circuits. On the other hand–I can do the same if I have Naoto's instincts, right? Then–"

Marie continued on,

"Simply put, the reason why we're in 'checkmate' under such a damned situation–is because of one thing. This situation isn't for you and I to work separately, Naoto."

Marie turned her head around.

In front of her was a scowling idiot, stretching his joints after breaking free.

"So Naoto–time for some give and take."

Having said that, she looked at herself, her thoughts deliberately stopped.

–Who's the one wrong in the first place?

What RyuZU said echoed in her mind.

–Yeah, damn it. I don't want to admit this no matter what, and it's really unbelievable…

Marie slowly inhaled, and looked around.

There was Houko, Halter, Vermouth, Conrad, who was synchronized with Vermouth, and right in front of her eyes, Naoto.

With all their stares gathered on her, she declared,

"**–Your senses are correct**, so I'll teach you how to use that feeling. On the other hand, teach me that feeling…!"

"Make full use of this sense…?"

Naoto repeated blankly, and Marie told him,

"You said it before, didn't you? No matter how you tried reading the textbooks and teaching materials, you don't get what it means. In other words, you find something odd with it, right"

"Ye-yeah…"

Naoto nodded in response to the succinct point Marie made.

"Then it's all easy now–what's wrong are the textbooks. Your instincts are correct."

"…Eh!?"

Naoto shouted in terror, and then frantically indicated,

"W-wait a second. I read the latest gear technology books!"

"I guessed so. So…**what's wrong is the current gear technology.**"

Marie admitted it.

…She admitted it.

What she blurted out from her mouth caused her to quiver in agitation.

She felt Houko, Halter and Vermouth watching on with bated breath.

And Conrad, through Vermouth, let out a voice of terror,

“Pardon me–Professor Marie. I do apologize for interrupting, but do allow me to finish. May I inquire what you are getting at…?”

“–It’s as what we said. The gear technology we learned about is wrong.”

One could sense Conrad gasp from the other end.

This is to be expected. Marie thought.

Admitting the errors of the current gear technology–would be equivalent to taking the initiative to deny herself and everyone who practiced that technology.

However…

“His instincts are definitely correct, proven by the Imaginary Gear’ in RyuZU that was repaired, and the abnormalities that were discovered precisely in the Core Tower. Since Naoto finds it strange–what’s wrong is us who assumed that we understood.”

Marie finished, and then gave a glare to Naoto.

“I don’t know the reasoning, and though I’m really unhappy about this, I really don’t know. One thing I can be sure of is that–your ability isn’t something that can be explained by exceptional hearing.”

“That…erm, in that case, what is it?”

While Naoto remained flustered, Marie continued,

“You–know the ‘answer’.”

“I know…the ‘Answer’?”

I don't understand, Naoto gave such a face, and Marie nodded at him, continuing on,

"You had the 'answer' beforehand, and that's how you know what it is, how it is supposed to work. Otherwise, how else would you know about how the trillions of little parts are supposed to work? Logically, it's impossible. What you vaguely described as 'voice', your 'answer'–was **overly correct**."

And then, she continued,

"–There isn't any 'technology' that uses such senses as premise. No matter what you do, it all comes back to 'status quo' for you, that you'll try all the methods again before you find the answers."

–Right, it's no wonder he can't understand any class topics. It's to be expected why he can't understand the blueprints.

If the questions, blueprints–all of them are 'faulty' in the first place, than Naoto, who knew of 'perfection', would have found it weird in the first place.

"So I guess I'm the first one. I'll help you–'start with class', a personal crash course from this Marie Bell Breguet designed for you. Dig your ears out and listen closely."

Upon hearing this, Naoto let out an audible gulp.

He was seat properly, staring at Marie intently.

With a serious look, Naoto was worried about missing out on every word Marie said, and even a single action.

And Marie nodded lightly, beginning the lesson–

"–Please analyze this in your mind. That's all for the lesson.

–It ended with this one line.

"……Huh?"

Naoto looked utterly disappointed, and scowled.

Are you making fun of me? That livid face of his was to the point of acrimony, but Marie did not mind as she continued,

“Since you can see the answer, you just need to analyze that answer and work backwards.”

“Work backwards…?”

“I guess…no, I’m certain that you’re in the state of hearing an orchestra performance before it happens.”

“…”

“Once the orchestra begins, you’ll start to be disappointed by the lackluster performance. Thus, you’ll identify all the instruments and performers one by one, until you figure out the problem, and start the performance again, repeating the same process all over–until it becomes a different tune altogether. Do you agree?”

Marie asked, and Naoto remained silent.

However, it was obvious from his startled face.

–*How did you know that much*His face was practically stating that much.

“What you need isn’t a blueprint, but a songsheet. You have a completely different method to us clockwork technicians, and you grasp things completely different from us–”

Marie shook her head,

“–No, it’s probably not a songsheet, but a waveform chart, I guess? Anyway, your understanding of gears is completely different from ordinary people. That’s the reason why you felt the awkwardness between the textbooks and what you know. What you see is rhythm, music…in other words, ‘flow’.”

–For example, yes, like light.

Light possessed two kinds of nature concurrently, ‘particles’ and ‘waves’.

It was said that the issue of whether light was of particles or waves had bothered scientists since ancient times.

If gears were to be described as light–then current gear technology would only view it as ‘particles’, while Naoto Miura understood it as ‘waves’.

Nobody taught him, and he naturally listened to it–as 'sound'.

And no matter how unreasonable, illogical it was, his answer was correct.

Just as light was 'particle' and 'wave'–

If she was to consider it this way, it was understandable.

He had the talent to grasp the gear structure more precisely than anyone else in the world, yet why would he not understand basic technology?

For that was because for Naoto, this damned genius–he was educated in a wrong manner.

At the very least–to Naoto, ordinary gear technology was merely a shackle to him.

It was to be expected. This was not self-explanatory. Perhaps it was a necessity.

With her mere knowledge of gears as 'particles' alone, it was impossible for her to understand gears that acted like 'waves'…

Thus, what Naoto needed was not a theory on the technology.

All he needed–was to follow his senses.

"You don't have to think about repairing it, or think about trying to put it all together. What you should do–is to analyze it, and go backwards."

Construct the perfect image in the mind.

For Naoto, he simply had to thoroughly analyze the 'perfect imagination' similar to the real thing, reverse engineer it, and it would become the blueprint for his own use.

Having finished this lesson, Naoto continued to stare at Marie intently.

His eyes were filled with respect, admiration and envy.

Back then, when she was in the 'Meister Guild', Marie's fellow technicians would give her such gazes, the gazes that hailed her genius.

And now that it was Naoto giving her such a look, Marie felt uncomfortable–and also humiliated, so she deliberately remained aloof, adding vitriol in her tone,

"Right, now it's your turn to teach me…"

…I'm not a genius.

Once she admitted this fact, Marie felt so calm, she was startled by it.

She was merely a counterfeit, simply filling up, dolling up on her self-depreciation.

A real genius. That would refer to her older sister, her father–or this infuriating pervert in front of her.

Marie had talent too. She put in the effort, and showed results.

But that was merely all.

She was unable to break out. She was adept at using what others created, but was unable to create anything brand new, anything unprecedented.

She was unable to use her own power to make the impossible possible.

And because she understood this more than anyone else, Marie forced herself to think,

–I'm someone who thinks that there's nothing impossible in the world.

It was not out of pride or dignity.

It was a definition Marie set for herself, one she definitely could not contort.

And for this definition, Marie denied all the common sense that formed her.

–Right, time to prepare myself. She thought.

What you'll know later on is knowledge completely different from what you know.

What he'll be teaching you, telling you, and whether you can understand it yourself–

Shake off these thoughts now.

–It's not whether I can, it's that I will.

How exactly does this abnormality in front of me views this world–

Doesn't matter whether I can understand, even if it's a fragment.

No matter how illogical it is, I have to absorb it. I must personally recreate it–!

With much anticipation, Marie awaited Naoto's words, and the latter merely told her,

"I suppose you already understood, more or less, Marie."

"…I already understood…?"

Marie raised her eyebrow as she repeated what Naoto said.

Naoto nodded, saying,

'You already knew…you learned about these little unique quirks I have. You already did so when you attached uncle Halter's head, didn't you?"

"…What are you saying? Well–I just know of the blueprint–"

"Really?"

Naoto flatly noted,

"You modified it in such a short time, without thinking at all, you know?"

Naoto's grey eyes showed admiration as he concluded,

"You saw it, Marie, you saw the 'result'–you saw the future you should connect to."

No–right when Marie was about to deny it instinctively, she shook her head.

Right–I should have admitted it in the first place.

Naoto Miura–he knew things he logically shouldn't have.

I don't know the logic and rationale behind it, but if I don't think of it this way, I can't explain it.

So if Naoto says that I can do it–I can do it.

This guy is simply stating his admiration, and right now he's assuring me for my genius. Is there anything more trustworthy than this?

Marie believed.

–That Naoto Miura simply had a little better hearing than ordinary people.

As he described himself, it was simply abnormality.

Assuming that he was viewed specially because his ears were far more precise than current equipment–Marie Bell Breguet would not lose out to him in this regard.

To refute this–despite her capabilities, she was willing to use current equipment to create equipment that that far exceeded her capabilities.

That was simply a unique quirk, a personal difference that was so miniscule, a simple matter of everyone having their own strengths.

But when that meshed with the delicate touch–

The human brain would surpass common sense.

Halter proved it.

Naoto's existence proved this.

–I too proved this countless times already!!

And then, an image appeared in Marie's mind like a flash, causing her to widen her eyes.

"–I see…so we're 'opposites'…you're completely different from me."

"Opposite?"

Naoto muttered with skepticism, and Marie looked at him, feeling confident.

Right, opposite.

Marie Bell Breguet was able to derive the answer from the events that led to the situation.

Naoto Miura was the one who created a scenario based on the 'ideal answer' he wanted.

And thus, by changing the methods–what they had to do was simple.

Backtrack.

Marie lifted her face, and said with enthusiasm,

“Naoto, tell me the major circuits or cores you hear in the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’–anyway, tell me everything you find that’s important. You know the outcome, so tell me what it is.”

Upon hearing that, Naoto answered skeptically.

“…Okay, but I don’t have the confidence that I can describe it perfectly, you know?”

“It’s fine–I’ll analyze everything, remember them, absorb and digest it all–how about it? Are you going to say that I can’t do it? Have at it!?”

Marie sneered as she said this.

And upon seeing that, Naoto showed a serious glint in his eyes, nodding lightly,

“…Now then, Marie. I’m not as smart as you are, and I’m not good at explaining with words, but if it’s you, I’m sure you’ll understand. Thus, I’m going to express what I feel.”

“–Alright.”

Bring it on–Marie swallowed back these words she was about to blurt out, and bit her lips.

Then–

“Marie, what I say from now on, ‘hear it, and forget it all’.”

“–Eh?”

Marie inadvertently squealed due to the setback from the conflicting words. Naoot however did not mind as he continued on,

“It’s fine if you can’t remember but don’t forget to hear it all and don’t listen so don’t think but think about”

“–”

“Everything right and everything wrong is all a paradox that is correct and right is left so there’s nothing and everything–”

“—-”

“I don’t know and yet I do.”

–Huh…?

“I know and yet I don’t.”

–Wai…!

“You may not remember and yet you have to so here I go.”

–Wait…!

THE 20TH FLOOR OF THE 'HEAVEN'S PILLAR' CAN'T CONTROL THE TEMPERATURE OF ALL THE GRIDS, BUT THERE IS A WAY. ALL THE LEVELS OF THIS TOWER, AND ALL THE PARTS ARE MOVING IN UNISON, AND THEY'RE ALL **SINGLE USE AND REPLACEMENT UNITS. THEY'RE MOVING FROM TOP TO BOTTOM FROM BOTTOM TO TOP FROM RIGHT TO LEFT FROM LEFT TO RIGHT FROM FRONT TO BACK FROM BACK TO FRONT,** ALL FORMING LITTLE GRIDS. BY REMOVING THE GRIDS, WHAT'S LEFT IS PURELY STORED ENERGY. I CAN'T FIND A CONTROL DEVICE, BUT THERE ARE SUCH THINGS EVERY, WHICH MEANS THERE **IS ONE HERE. LOST GEARS WON'T COME BACK, AND BASED ON THE DAMAGE, THE OTHER GEARS WILL HELP BEAR THE BURDEN. WE SHOULDN'T BE THINKING ABOUT BYPASSES, BUT DIRECT CIRCUITS.** EVEN IF WE CAN'T MAKE UP FOR THE SPACES, WE CAN DO IT. RETAIN THE ORIGINAL SHAPE AND DESTROY IT. FORGET ALL ABOUT IT. OVERTURN IT, BLUFF IT. **MAKE IT THINK IT WORKS. STOP THE BALANCES EXTEND THE SPRINGS TWIST THE ESCAPE WHEEL BREAK THE FORK SKIP THE ANCHORS MOVE THE GEARS UP AND DOWN SPREAD THE POWER TO THE HA**MMER AND SPIN THE CORE AROUND. SYSTEM 86754 TO SYSTEM 96640 ROTATION SPIN WILL BE SLOWED TO NUMBER 36396 AND STOPPED. **RESTART IT.** RECONNECT TO THE WHEEL TRAIN, AND GEAR 457 TO WHEEL TRAIN 3360, SLOW DOWN ALL THE BALANCE WHEELS THAT'S CONNECTED, ESCAPEMENT AMPLITUDE FROM 4634 TO 3053. AT THE SAME TIME, CONNECT ALL THE INSTALLATIONS TILL NUMBER 3530 DIRECTLY TO THE SYSTEM 406464 BELOW IT. BY MAKING SURE THE 15TH FLOOR TO T**HE 18TH FLOOR ARE WORKING TOGETHER, YOU CAN CONTROL THE POWER OF THE SPRINGS FLOWING FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP. THE P**OWER FLOWING FROM THE 22ND LEVEL TO THE 28TH FLOOR IS TO CONTINUE TO THE 21ST LEVEL, AND THE RESONANCE IS TO CONTINUE TO THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE ON THE 20TH LEVEL. BY USING THIS, WE CAN CONTINUE THE POWER CONTROL INSTALLATION FROM THE 19TH LEVEL TO ALL THE GRIDS. W**E JUST NEED TO IGNORE THE INSTALLATION ON THE 20TH LEVEL AND DRAW OUT THE POWER. AND THEN WE STOP IT. RESTART THE WHEEL TRAIN, RAISE THE ROTATION SPEED OF ALL THE CONNECTED SYSTEMS. WHAT WE NEED TO CHANGE AREN'T THE WEATHER OR TEMPE**RATURE. IT'S THE ENERGY FLOW. WE'RE NOT CREATING A PHENOMENON, BUT AN **OUTCOME. WE'RE CHANGING T**HE RULES FOR A SUITABLE ALGEBRA. WE DON'T HAVE TO CALCULATE IT. JUST FI**ND THE ROTATIONAL SPEED WE LIKE, AND THAT'S THE RIGHT RESONANCE VALUE.**

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THAT'S THE WRONG ONE. THAT'S WHY WE NEED THE OTHER INSTALLATIONS TO FOLLOW UP. CUT OFF ALL THE WIRES IN SYSTEM 35350, LET SYSTEM 457060 SPIN IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. LET IT FLOW WITHOUT USING ENERGY. LET THE ENERGY OUTPUT HEAD IN THE REVERSE DIRECTION, AND MAKE USE OF BOTH DIRECTIONS. IT'LL CREATE THE ENERGY WE NEED THEN. LET THE ROTATIONAL CONTROL SYSTEM FROM THE 5TH LEVEL TO THE 10TH LEVEL RESONATE. INCREASE SPEED FROM 3535 TO 4540, AND ADJUST TO PREVENT REJECTION. WE NEED TO TUNE THE SYSTEMS 3500 IN GRID 3356 ON THE 14TH LEVEL. DON'T MAKE ANY MISTAKE. DESTROY IT THOUGH. TURN THE MOVEMENT ITSELF. NO NEED TO REASSEMBLE IT, IT'LL REASSEMBLE BY ITSELF. THE GEARS WILL FIT BACK IN ITS PLACE BEFORE WE DO ANYTHING. FORCE SYSTEM 5356 TO WORK, AND FORCE IT TO ERR. USE THE DAMAGED INSTALLATION TO ITS LIMIT, AND ERR AGAIN. THAT'LL PREVENT IT FROM COLLAPSE. BY GOING BACK TO THE CABLE CIRCUIT, IT'LL CONNECT TO THE BARREL ON THE 29TH LEVEL. IT'LL PUT IT OVER AS A REPLACEMENT. IT'LL REGULARLY OPERATE IRREGULARLY, ACTING BASED ON THE NEW RULES. IT'LL MAKE UP FOR THE VOID AND CREATE HEAT. THE LEADING POINT IS THE 26TH GRID. THE CORE TOWERS ACTING IN UNISON WILL SPIN ACCORDINGLY IN THEIR DISTINCT MANNER, AND FROM RIGHT TO LEFT, THE ORDER ARE 3430, 3035, 3056, 3053, 3124, 3894. USE THE CONNECTING MOVEMENTS TO REPLACE THE WIRES. MAKE SURE THE RESONANCE COUNT ON THE 26TH GRID KEEPS RISING, AND AT THE SAME TIME, MAKE ADJUSTS WITHOUT MESSING UP THE SURROUNDING RESONANCE. THE BASIS TO BE USED IS THE TERMINAL MOVEMENT ON THE 1ST LEVEL, BUT NONE OF THEM IS TO BE OF A SIMILAR LOOKING VALUE. MAKE SURE ALL HAVE BEEN CHANGED BEFORE IT'S SIMILAR.

AND FINALLY—IF A CLOCKWORK DEVICE CAN'T FUNCTION WHEN MISSING A GEAR, WHY IS THIS PLANET STILL ABLE TO CONTINUE MOVING?

"…Marie, you awake?"

"——Eh?"

The palm shaking in front of Marie's eyes finally caused her to blurt out.

She was inadvertently gasping–what did Naoto just do to her? What did he say?

"Right, looks like you're awake. You remember everything?"

"–Ack? Eh? Remember what?"

Marie was tongue-tied for a moment, tilting her head in skepticism.

She had a vague impression, but Naoto seemed to have told her a lot of things–?

"Right, okay–looks like you 'remember'."

"W-wait!? What did you just–"

"I said before that I want to express what I feel, right? I just converted what I felt in my mind into words."

"W-wait a sec! I said I'll remember! What you just said, I–"

"You remember."

Naoto pointed up to the day, as though indicating 'the sun has risen', chuckling,

"Marie…you remembered all the products of the Breguets company, all the weapons and machines in the world, and even RyuZU's blueprint…right?"

Marie nodded blankly, and Naoto continued,

"**Since you don't know, I'll tell you, alright?** No ordinary person–is able to do such a thing."

Naoto seemed to be returning the favor as he grinned away, saying those words, causing Marie to widen her eyes.

"I said it, didn't I? **You already knew, Marie.** The only difference between us is just a matter of eyes and ears…ah, I'll say it here. I do remember everything about

RyuZu's structure, down to the wire, you know?"

Marie blankly watched Naoto state this proudly with a defiant streak, and went silent.

–Ponder the meaning of what Naoto just said.

Was that all just about 'remembering', or was it that she 'already knew'?

While she continued to brood with vague thought, Naoto told her,

"It's fine–my senses have been converted to words successfully, so you'll definitely be able to understand."

"…Really?"

"Marie, you remembered what I said. You don't remember, yet you do. The Marie I know–the genius Marie would definitely be able to 'understand the entire floor'."

"–Why do you think I can do it?"

"It's not about what I think, it's about what I know. Your memory, Marie–is why I'm so envious, and respect it so much. It's embarrassing, but I got to tell you this."

Naoto took a deep breath.

"–It's the same, just like that. You didn't simply 'memorize' it, Marie, you simply 'grasped' it somewhat. So–I felt maybe I could do it too."

Naoto showed a somewhat gaudy smile.

And then, he showed an expression Marie never did see before–an expression filled with confidence and trust.

"It's fine. Believe."

Naoto merely told Marie this, and stood up.

He picked up the tools that were scattered on the floor, and returned to his position. Marie watched his back with her eyes, and gulped, before following what he did.

With tools in her head, Marie naturally walked on, and moved to her 'post'.

However, at that moment–her hands stopped, and then…

She got frustrated.

To be honest, Marie did not understand what Naoto just said.

What do I do? What shall I do? Where do I begin from–?

Marie thought–before she proceeded to **mock herself**.

"Ha–"

She was laughing at herself several minutes ago. In other words–she would certainly be so anxious at this moment, falling into despair again like usual, being the Marie Bell Breguet who was unable to move.

But the current her **was different**.

That Naoto, the image of a hero she admired, the ideal image she aimed to be, the undoubted genius…

With countless repeated convictions–he wanted Marie to 'believe'.

The ideal hero she had went out of the way to assure her.

Very good–Marie boldly smiled.

Right–now's the only time.

With that as guarantee, I'll go along with that expectation, and enter the world that guy sees–!

"–Count to 4, take a breath….count to 3, take a breath–"

Marie muttered, trying to force her concentration to its maximum.

She was aiming for the sensation she felt when she connected Halter.

And once she was confident that she was in the realm where she could see the entire city–

"Count to 3, take a breath; count to 2, take a breath, count to 2, take a breath again, count to 1–"

–She closed her eyes. All the sounds vanished, her consciousness became clear,

ridding itself of all noise.

And then…in the consciousness she was submerged in, her imagination proceeded to open their eyes.

–Right in front of her was a deep, deep hole.

That hole was dark, the bottom nary to be seen, and the wrecked doors remained ajar.

The wrecked doors had some words inscribed on them, similar to something she saw in a collection of classical poems,

–"*'Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate'*."

I see, Marie thought as she grimaced, and firmly believed,

That beyond these words, would be the actual hell–the world 'Naoto Miura sees', the 'other world'.

Marie smiled–abandon hope. Hope?

Such a vague, God-given thing was not something she would have to give up. She already lost it.

In that case–the 'greed' and 'pride' to reveal everything about this world…

With these two 'great sins', it was easy for her to jump forward–!

And right when Marie was about to step forward, what was left of her remaining sanity warned her,

"Jump inside here,, and there's no way back."

–I'm already prepared. But is this really the world–the world Naoto is leading me to–?

This little hesitation caused her consciousness, once buried, to appear in her eyes.

Right in front of her was Naoto Miura–already at work.

At first, he was listening intently to the void as usual, and then, he slowly–yet without hesitation, kept working without stopping.

He was an undisputed–an impressive ‘clockwork technician’ to whoever looking on.

Marie was fully convinced of it–that Naoto had changed.

His movements were not as fast as hers, and neither was it as polished as a Meister; there were a few times where he took the wrong tool, but–there was no hesitation as to ‘where he was supposed to touch’ as he worked fast, and easily surpassed the Meisters who first started out.

To correct what Marie assumed–Naoto did not change.

–That, that was truly, how he was, the real thing, the one being that caused ignited hatred in her subconsciously.

(–What amateur is this? Isn’t this a **real genius**?)

Marie felt an ember burn increasingly within her heart, becoming a bonfire that burned everything.

–I’m going to catch up to that. I’m willing to go anywhere for this aim…!!

She was again submerged in her consciousness, imagining herself standing in front of that hole.

She was in this world devoid of sound–but,

“…Hey, Marie.”

…The voice echoed so clearly however.

And when her eyes focused, she saw Naoto, standing deep within the hell–far beyond the gates of Hell, slowly turn his head around.

“–What are you scared of?”

Naoto’s voice and back were reaching out to Marie, seemingly mocking her.

At that moment, Marie’s heart was scorching.

"–Don't get cocky now. I won't allow you to stop and turn back, and no helping me–I'm going to catch up to you, and send a flying kick at your back–!"

Marie growled furiously, and charged forth with all her might.

–She was headed towards the place she yearned to be.

And as she took the one way route to Hell–

And then, at that moment–time stopped.

This feeling…of course, she had an impression of it.

She did have such a sensation when she was so focused on repairing, her concentration at its maximum.

A fish swimming freely in its dream, the senses she knew of extended to infinity–till this point, it was still a familiar concept to her.

However, for Marie, whose eyes were widened due to reality…

–The world changed.

She looked up, and the sight of gears rattling together was as usual–but…

It appeared the wind was dyed with color, for the forces, operations, flow, directions–they appeared to be spinning like a vortex.

The 'wind' she saw at this point was something she normally could not see.

The 'color' she realized at this point was something she should not be able to know of.

For the thing Naoto recognized as a 'voice', Marie saw it as a 'color'.

Naoto imprinted massive information upon Marie's mind–and the latter recognized it as 'synchronization'.

The overwhelming amount of information was scorching the mind, causing a sense of riveting blissfulness.

The visualized blueprint. The image version of physical laws.

And as she sensed the boundless omnipotence driving her, Marie thought,

"–Why, I guess I'm a genius after all."

Marie recalled the despair she felt in Akihabara, the ludicrous delusions.

Ahh, I guess I'm somewhat useful after all–Marie mocked herself, and picked up a tool.

–'Everything is just an illusion', that impression itself, not that sensation–**was correct**.

Everything she could see was all wrong.

No, she could not look deep below the world covered by the surface.

It felt as she she revealed an 'illusion', as though a 'membrane' was shed from the world.

Marie, who had abandoned all concepts before this, could firmly believe–

Naoto was able to use his ears to affirm the 'abnormalities' in the 'Core Tower' or the 'Heaven's Pillar'.

Vermouth was able to use something that was not exactly a prosthetic, and fight an 'abnormality' to such an extent.

No, that was not all.

At this point, Marie abandoned all the concepts she had–everything she accepted till this point–and eliminated them…

She was able to realize that everything–everything on this world was 'abnormalities', and 'normals'.

Resonance non-contact gears? Nanogears? Clockwork AIs that replicated human thoughts?

They were all 'abnormalities'.

–If one was to think about them logically, how could such things possibly exist…

The one who designed those things, or the ones who analyzed the details, probably subconsciously, or occasionally, latched their fingertips upon the 'Core of the world', and created–and then…

After that, they created theories.

All theories, science, and technology was as such.

First, the results were obtained, and then, they would explain the theories by 'handwaving it'.

If they understand, it was nothing–but if current theories could not explain, then what?

–The Earth used to be flat.

After that, humans looked at planets, wrote mathematical formulae, constructed astrology, and understood that the Earth was spherical. They learned that the Earth revolved around the sun–but what about before this was proven?

Was the Earth flat? Were they the center of the universe?

–No, nothing changed.

The world was always being reconstructed. That was–through 'humanity's own hands'–!!

And this time, through the hands of a somewhat mad man, the landscape was reconstructed into gears.

That was a thousand years ago…

But, perhaps–**was the world already mechanized at that point**?

Having understood this sensation at this point, Marie found this to be skeptical too–and upon thinking of this, she smiled,

'Y' wanted to use clockwork technology to recreate the world–that was what was said.

In that case–Marie looked at the surroundings, the swirling scenery that was dyed with color due to her resonated senses, thinking,

–I guess this is how the world really looks like–after the 'illusion' has been peeled off.

Marie began to work.

She refined her consciousness, conjuring images.

Her accelerated thoughts were extracting the knowledge she wanted from the compressed information within her.

What she should do, what she had to do.

–Everything was clear, consistent.

“I’m right, no? If I can, so can you, right Marie?”

Naoto exclaimed in elation.

Through his voice and breath, it was certain that he sensed the change in Marie–

“–Of course…! Who do you think I am? I’m Marie–the genius who makes the impossible possible, God! I’m the woman who’s going to crush you one day!”

–I know. The world I’m seeing now is the things Naoto’s showing me.

But since she knew of this feeling, even if she was by herself, she would definitely get to this realm…!

And then, the two of them can go along with their instincts and senses, exchanging smiles–

Marie abandoned her comprehension as she began to work beyond human intelligence.

AnchoR was standing on the edge of Grid Ueno, looking down on Grid Akihabara that was right below her.

The moist red eyes were staring directly at the massive, mechanical spider of a monster.

The little hands were wavering in front of her chest, touching the cube.

At that moment,

“–Please wait.”

A voice could be heard from behind.

AnchoR did not turn back to look.

For despite not doing so, she would be able to understand who that voice belonged to, and for what purpose.

In contrast, she answered with a stiff voice,

"…Don't stop me, sister."

No. That sister–RyuZU, replied.

"Stop. Master Naoto told me tos top you."

"…Papa did say…that AnchoR can do whatever she wants, you know?"

"Freedom and selfishness are two different matters altogether. When a child commits a fault, parents have the right and duty to chide and correct. AnchoR, your decision is wrong here."

AnchoR turned around.

"Then…in that case…is there anything else?"

RyuZu did not answer AnchoR's question, but the latter continued on,

"..If I don't destroy that thing, everyone will die. The only one able to deal with it is AnchoR…and, AnchoR…isn't like you, sister. AnchoR only knows how to destroy…"

RyuZU took the brunt of those words.

Her vision was lowered, the topaz eyes exchanging looks with the red ruby eyes.

And then, the latter took a breath, saying,

"AnchoR–that's where you're wrong."

"…Eh?"

Upon hearing her sister's words, AnchoR widened her eyes, wondering *what are you saying? Amongst us sisters, I'm the only one built for combat–what else can I*

do other than to destroy?

RyuZU took a step closer, bending slightly.

“I shall repeat this until you understand. That is not the reason why your built. What you are expected to do, what you need to do, it is not for this simple matter.”

“…”

AnchoR was startled.

RyuZU reached out to that unmoving body, patting her lightly on the shoulder,

“–You bear the fate of ‘Trishula’, the ‘power’ with the name of anchor, and you are the strongest amongst us sisters.”

“…Yes, that’s why…I have to destroy–”

“And because of that, you do not understand. Why are you allowed to be the ‘Trishula’, the ‘Destroyer’? Why must you be granted the name of ‘AnchoR’?”

“Why…?”

AnchoR muttered. RyuZU slowly nudged away.

She placed her hand tenderly on AnchoR’s head, gently caressing it.

“But–”

RyuZU gave a wry smile,

“Your ‘thought’ is not wrong. So I will–not be stopping you.”

“Sister…?”

I don’t understand, AnchoR wondered,

–What is sister trying to say? What am I wrong about? What is right?

And while AnchoR remained skeptical, RyuZU said,

“Your ‘thoughts’ are precious, and correct. But before then, you should try believing in Master Naoto–and the worthless Master Marie to go along with it.”

RyuZU paused, saying,

"–Please wait until the very end."

Right in front of them–was a boy and a girl executing diviine skills beyond human understanding.

Vermouth saw such a scene, and silently muttered,

"I say, old man…you're a Meister too right?"

And from the same mouth, an old man's voice responded,

"…Yes. Or 'I used' to be."

"Then, mind telling me one thing–is that a Meister? If that's the case, then while I gave up on being human other than my head, those guys–"

The last part of those words were not verbalized.

While Vermouth was starting to feel terrified,

"Pardon me, young Vermouth–but to declare ourselves Meisters in front of those two–the apex of the technicians in this world, I suppose that would be a mockery of ourselves."

–Human had limits.

Human possibilities are infinite–but no matter how one tried to puff those words, the reality would not change.

Till this point in his life, Conrad had seen many young people–with futures, talented.

They were truly brimming with talent, absorbing things like a sponge soaking up water, learning and converting what they learned into their own matter. They received the inheritance left behind by their predecessors–knowledge, and continued moving forward towards the realm no man could reach alone in their lifetime.

But–despite this, they had to stop at a certain place.

Setbacks, haughtiness, conceitedness, arrogance, loss of strength–Conrad understood very well that it was too much to dismiss that as immaturity.

For that was humanity. Anyone with a heart would reach that wall. Thus, despite possessing infinite possibilities, humans would seal off their possibilities somewhere. Or sometimes, they would be crushed by those possibilities. Or sometimes, they would ultimately ruin themselves. Or sometimes, they would go mad.

–*However, Marie had already gone beyond that limit,* so Conrad thought.

She would not compromise, nor succumb. Despite multiple setbacks and failures, she continued to move forward–and reached that realm. She had 'already' reached the realm that could be considered the apex of this world.

Or at the very least, that appeared to be the case of Conrad's eyes.

–Because of this, the scenery before Conrad caused him to realize his incomplete understanding.

The petite girl–was willing to compromise and squeeze out everything she absorbed in her sponge. Despite this, she chose to continue moving forward.

Chasing after the back of that boy–who was at a realm Conrad, probably nobody in this world could approach–

"…Professor Marie, where exactly do you intend to be…"

He was filled with admiration as he muttered, looking afar. Vermouth told him,

"…I don't know what's going on. But after seeing people actually doing such things, I'm starting to have the urge to challenge the 'dream' I'm about to forget–isn't this saying that men are still brats no matter how old they are? What do you think, old man?"

"Hmm…I see. It does make sense."

Conrad agreed, and added,

"…Even at this age, the young ones really did teach me a lesson. I suppose I am still immature after all? Now that I look at this way, I do feel delighted wondering if I will continue to grow, and what results will occur."

Upon hearing Conrad's cheerful voice, Vermouth gave a wry smile,

"Yeah, looking forward to it. Build me the best Dutch Wife."

Vermouth paused.

"Of course–of the standard of that Initial-Y."

But once he heard that joking voice, Conrad did not appear to be displeased.

He merely seemed surprised, asking,

"…Hm? Did I say anything that implied *that*?"

"Nothing? It's just that I'm a lifeform who manages to live on through instincts."

Vermouth looked down at his prosthetic–or to be precise, the playdoll automata body Conrad created, and continued on,

"You built a playdoll automata meant for viewing so thoroughly–I don't think you probably have any ideas after looking at one, right?"

"Well…it's not really something amazing. I forgot about it myself."

Conrad said as he reminiscenced over the past.

"–That was when I was in my twenties."

"That was a long time back."

"There was a young chap back then, famous for being the youngest Meister in the world, hailed as an unprecedented genius."

"Oh, so were you that guy?"

"Why, thank you for realizing. In any case, that chap was requested by his own country, Her Majesty back then, to deal with something. There was an automata that would not move, hidden in the Royal Family–the words imprinted on the neck were…'Y, 'BezEL', I suppose?"

"–"

Vermouth was silent. Conrad continued with a wry tone,

"That lad was in disbelief. Back then–and it was half a century back. The equipment were not as powerful as they are now–the lad's pride was crushed in the face of this amazing, divine artistry, a Core Tower practically compressed into a young girl's body. That lad then swore that he had to personally build an automata that surpassed it.."

"…Is that the reason why you became a clockwork technician?"

“Surely you jest?”

Conrad gave a wry smile.

“I did mention that I had long forgotten about it. Surprisingly for me however, perhaps it was always deep inside me somewhere.”

However–

“–Challenge a Initial-Y series…well, this isn’t a bad ‘dream’.”

“Isn’t this great? This is what they mean by revisiting your youth, isn’t it?”

Vermouth’s shoulders were shaking as he laughed. But at this moment–his sights turned to the clock.”

“Leaving that aside…I can say it’s not just a matter of passing humanity, and looks like they’ve already surpassed God. But…isn’t this right, old man?”

“Hm, yes…even at this speed–there is only a 50% chance of making it.”

They had a look at the clock; there was only 3 minutes left.

Naoto and Marie shortened the 1 hour of work by a dozen Meisters to 30 seconds.

But despite this–creating new circuits for the severely damaged ‘Heaven’s Pillar’–would take 120 Meisters a month. What Conrad was worried about was whether the time could be shortened to 180 seconds.

But–assuming that could be done, that would be something beyond God–

The promised time had arrived.

The limit of 72 minutes Naoto declared was approaching.

I can’t wait anymore. AnchoR stood u, saying,

“…Now then, sister…I shall be going, I guess…”

She touched the dangling cube in front of her chest.

The armory was opened with a tremendous rip in the air. AnchoR drew out the

weapon she possessed–no, it was a toy teddy bear.

Naoto bought this for her 2 days ago.

AnchoR took off the ring on her right middle finger, and handed it to RyuZU along with the teddy bear.

“Erm…I’m scared of dirtying it…please help me take it.”

“…I shall accept it.”

RyuZU received the ring and teddy bear, looking somewhat skeptical as she continued,

“AnchoR, if you do get ‘serious’, you will surpass my ‘Mute Scream’. Wait until 71 minutes and 59 seconds–”

“Sorry, sister…I won’t wait.”

AnchoR immediately shook her head in response.

“I obeyed what papa ordered me to do. So…it doesn’t matter. AnchoR will end everything, won’t let anyone hurt–papa and the others–”

AnchoR turned to look below.

She was looking down at the block below–the ‘target’ lying in wait at Akihabara.

The ominous, massive–thing that wanted to kill the ones she loved.

She stared at the one thing–she decided she would merciless destroy, and took a breath.

She touched the cube in front of her chest.

The spring spun, and all the power stored within the ‘Perpetual Gear’.

Was all converted into–

“AnchoR.”

The older sister called out her name from behind.

However, AnchoR did not look back. She took a step forward towards the battlefield–to obliterate everything.

“AnchoR.”

The older sister repeated her call. The tone was the same as before, filled with noble elegance.”

“–When you get back, Master Naoto shall tell you something you do not know about yourself. I do not wish to force you to remain unscathed.”

However, this proud older sister continued with a poignant voice.

“You have to return. If you have no intention of doing so–”

A pause.

“–As the older sister, I shall drag you back, even if it means a little punishment.”

AnchoR looked a little sad as her lips curled.

“…Sorry…but sister, you can’t stop AnchoR, you know?”

“Now that will be a tough thing to say. You are the little sister I am so proud of,

but I suppose you are getting a little too carried away, and it seems I have a need to–educate you again."

"–"

"You have to know that even in and out of the heavens, there is no automata more outstanding than I am–and that there is no little sister more outstanding than this older sister♪"

Ha–Anchor inadvertently chuckled, and nodded.

And then, she leaped.

From a height of 1,5000m–towards the magnetized Grid Akihabara.

—

The red and white girl fell, her hair and clothes flapping with the intense winds.

Her mouth was throbbing slightly, leaking some sounds.

It was not the usual vague, childish voices, but a cold, mechanical voice converted into language.

'Defining Declaration–Initial Y series, Unit 04, 'Trishula' AnchoR."

She affirmed with the voice of one declaring a revolution.

Condition Check–All Green.

Balance Wheel, number 1. Armaments undamaged. Full Activation Condition, removal confirmed.

Warning–Stored Energy in Ten thousand Flowers Fragrance Box , 'Power Reservoir'–6.1%. Power calculation…done.

Maximum power, 12th Movement activated, subjective maximum power output estimated at 3.2 seconds.

–Ignored.

Inherent function—Ten Thousand Flowers Fragrance Box (Power Reservoir)… beginning transformation sequence.

She stated her intent to rebel.

It was a declaration that from this moment onwards–**she would defy all physical laws.**

At the same time, she affirmed the enemy.

The target–was the multipedal electromagnetic tactical class weapon 'Yatsukahagi'.

320m in height, 932m in length.

She recognized the source of the heat–the central Core, affirmed that there was electromagnetic technology used.

At at instant, she sensed someone inside her, differing from her will, chuckling within.

–Really, even after 1,000 years, you're still there?

Even AnchoR could not understand what this was all about, but the battle simulation continued to analyze the enemy in her eyes.

The enemy armaments: electromagnetic pulse gun, railgun and a microwave mega cannon.

Equipped with phased array radar and an infrared sight. Current position is within enemy effective range.

Enemy armor is a magnetic shield. Inferring from the information that it deflected Unit 01 RyuZU's slice attack, deduced minimum output to destroy is at 11–

"–Enemy threat level, classification 'lacquer'–Balance Wheel, begin shift to number 13."

The girl's body then began to sear.

The laws of physics began to rattle, the paradoxes in concepts began to rub against each other.

"–Began change–Balance Wheel, number 2."

The round disc within AnchoR–the automata built for combat, began to spin.

It was a device akin to a clock. The hand hand jumped to the position marked II, moving towards III.

“–Number 3–moving beyond activation condition for ‘Bloody Murder’–”

At the same time, the girl’s black glossy hair reached out in an arc, dyed in a bloody red color.

The white armor expanded ominously, the glowing red lines spreading madly over the black armor.

“–Number 4–5–6, 7, 8–”

The revolutions accelerated.

The girl knew that the surging heat was wrecking time, contorting it, maddening it.

For every gear that increased, the subjective time would lengthen increasingly.

“9, 10, 11–”

She felt the clock hand in her body spin around once, and concluded,

–*‘Another method’ I told Master.*

The weapons she could use were limited, but with the high power frequency activation, most ordinary weapons could not be used–but it was fine, for there was no other plausible method, and there was no time.

“–Number 12–Stored armament LB01, BC08–deploy.”

The cube in front of the chest spun.

After that, a mechanical gear sword taller than AnchoR appeared in her right hand.

Following that immediately afterwards were 8 balls floating behind AnchoR.

And then, the girl’s chest bloomed.

The clothes covering the chest broke apart, the artificial skin ripped open, the ribs erratically converted into a vessel.

The spinning cube continued to accelerate with no signs of slowing down, moving at near lightspeed.

And at that next moment, with the infinitely increasing heat, the cube was embedded deep within the girl's blooming chest.

"–Removing the subjective regulative condition out of 'free will'–breakthrough."

The clock hand pointing at XII within the girl's body was throbbing intensively in a resistive manner.

The clock hand was twisted, turning, and the reverberation was maddening. Finally, there were numerous cracks, breaking and scattering.

At that moment, AnchoR knew–that on this day, the dream known as eternity would end.

"Balance Wheel, number 13–beginning 'Self-destructive Movement'."

She would burn for eternity. Within the flames, the girl transformed into a woman.

Her limbs grew longer, the hair infused with massive heat fell like a waterfall.

The armor melted and fell off, the light red glossy dress showing off an alluring body.

"Chronofork–beginning Perpetual Gear imaginary output, appear."

And then–

In this still world, the pretty girl AnchoR who burned herself to her limit and changed her appearance–

Said the second terminal line only she out of all the Initial-Y series possessed.

"–Ending Movement 'Steel Weight'–"

That was the obituary indicating her demise.

The Perpetual Gear–the function that proved the concept of eternity, had an error, and continued with the noises of activation.

The delusion of the eternal girl was breaking apart. Reality was denying herself, awakening.

However, the ending movement proved one thing.

The illogical fallacy of the 'Trishula'–that there was nothing indestructible in these three thousand years.

–It was simple.

Unlike Unit 01 RyuZU , who ruled the Imaginary time, she could use infinite heat to forcefully rip through time distortions–but this act in itself would bring about friction, inertia, gravity, recoil. She removed the forces that were protecting her from being affected–increasing the output on the premise of self-destruction.

That alone allowed her to continued running at the maximum output–as per her announcement of the name Perpetual Gear.

–For eternity.

Until her body, frame and parts reached their limits and broke apart.

The eternal was performing a requiem–and as this paradoxical melody was

played.

The pretty person rebelling against the universe ripped aside the world shackled down by all physical laws–and leaped forward

AnchoR continued to move forward in this compressed world.

There were 8 balls floating behind her.

Those were originally miniature orbits attack drones, but AnchoR leet these orbits move along with her movement output and resonance chain–increasing the output to the maximum.

The cannons became something similar to boosters, shooting out invisible flames.

With the massive thrust from the 8 units, AnchoR accelerated.

She charged towards the 'target' at a speed nobody on this world could observe.

(–Get in–!)

AnchoR raised the broadsword with both hands, striking a pose.

There were gears of particle size spinning rapidly on the blade. Typically, it could sever everything, ignoring the thickness of the material.

But in this moment, when time appeared to have approached infinity and stopped–the 'current' that was between the gap of zero and one second, the gears on the blade would not be able to move at that speed. If she was to do so, they would be vaporized along with the accelerated orbits.

Thus–AnchoR **raised the sword, timed herself, and swung it down.**

Using the endurance of this gear sword, at a speed beyond human comprehension, and the reliance of the laws of physics as though it was normal–

"—!"

The blade went through.

The sword creaked–actually, there would not be sounds coming through in this space–AnchoR merely felt the sword cut, and continued to move.

She kept ‘throwing’–the 8 orbits that were following her.

The orbits hit the cut surface on the armor at lightspeed, damaging and spreading a tremendous amount of energy, which peeled off the electromagnetic armor, vaporizing it.

AnchoR charged through the opening she made that was barely enough for a person to squeeze through.

And so, she charged into the inside of the ‘Yatsukahagi’–

(–…!)

–Then, she collapsed.

At that instant, of the shock removers that exceeded 30 in numbers all over her body, 12 of them were severely damaged.

AnchoR felt the frame creaking, everything, from the tiny parts in her body, starting to break apart, and–

(Auto Gyro–is okay…it’s fine!)

She shook off the shackle of gravity, leaped up, **landed** on the wall, and started moving her feet.

–Once she reached the first target, her right leg that reached out was wrecked due to the heat and the impact.

The frame was contorted, the shock removers blown apart.

–She was so heated that the temperature inside that machine had no effect, and several parts were already at melting temperature. At this part, AnchoR was so giving off far more than than the amount required to remove the magnetism.

However, she ignored that too.

AnchoR continued to swing the sword at the partition wall right in front of her eyes.

She continued to slash at a speed that would drive the universe insane, and instantaneously reduced the partition wall to plasma.

Before the plasma spread, AnchoR stomped on the floor and accelerated–only to sense her legs were damaged–but she ignored it.

She reached the room, and affirmed what seemed to be the movement–31 of the 1033 coils Naoto mentioned.

The piston that took the form of a giant, intricate screw, with tremendous electromagnetic power.

(…Ah…aaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!)

AnchoR let out a silent roar.

She put aside the ‘pain’ that was cutting away at the connecting function of her arms–and with one swing of the sword, she obliterated everything on the floor.

–……

The human in this machine–the only living heat source–Gennai remained unmoved.

To be correct, he could not move. No, he probably could not realize that.

AnchoR, in that ‘Steel Weight’ mode, was unable to deduce the difference between the external time and the time she was experiencing.

But from the time AnchoR cut into the inside of the armor and destroyed the partition world–even after destroy 809 coils, a mere 0.24 seconds had passed.

It would take–at least 0.3 seconds until the shock spread out, Gennai’s mind recognized that impact, and his mind converted it into ‘shock’.

–……

For every step she took–the manipulators were irreversibly damaged.

For every step she made–the shock became heat, causing the actuator to melt.

And despite this, AnchoR continued to swing the sword–until her right arm was ripped off.

The broadsword flew along with the forearm to a completely unexpected place–at a speed far beyond the railgun of this massive weapon, embedded deeply into the wall at the side.

However, AnchoR ripped off her arm from the hilt, and used her remaining left hand to grip the sword–

(Ha–ah, ahh–ahhhhhh–!!)

With that, she swung the sword using brute force.

The sword ripped through the space, igniting an explosion.

The impact from the crushing during this time caused the space to be ripped apart, matter to vanish.

The scars continued to spread like waves, the heat and pressure blew an entire level on the behind the wall before her, erasing everything.

The heat created light, the impacts caused booms.

AnchoR could not withstand the impact, and slammed into the wall.

She was finding it increasingly difficult to control her posture–for even the sounds on this sealed space could not reach her.

–However,

AnchoR continued on to the next floor like a ghost–

—

(–It…hurts…)

It hurts. She muttered in pain within her heart.

She continued to move at a speed nobody could observe breaking through the armor of the massive weapon at a speed faster than light, and at the same time, barged inside, obliterating everything in site–

When she destroyed the 932nd coil, she finally felt the end.

The Auto Gyro melted, and everything below her left knee ceased function. Her right arm was already ripped off, and even the broadsword that displayed astonishing endurance was vaporized just a moment back.

Her thought process was being cut.

Her malfunctioning installations were crushed by the universe’s common sense.

AnchoR was practically losing all mobility, but despite being reduced to such a state, once she reached her destination–

“Ah–aahhhhhh!!!”

She screamed–and punched the door down with her remaining left hand.

And then, she realized something.

The fist’s power punctured through the door, blowing up several coils on the floor behind it.

The shrapnel fell along with the gravity, and through the noise, she recognized her scream and destruction.

–She could no longer act beyond real time.

(…It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts–it…)

Her heart was shrieking in pain.

–Papa, mama, sister, save me–

Her instincts were wailing such pessimistic words before her rational mind could.

But her rational mind coldly assessed the battle situation before she could be ashamed of this fact.

Her subjective time was no longer any different from realtime.

So–how many seconds did pass after she attack? Or was it several minutes?

She had yet to destroy all the movements.

She did not know how much had to be destroyed until it would stop–but just in case, if she did not destroy everything, everyone would–

“–Ahh–ahh…”

Even her voice installation lost its ability to function.

–She was nearing her limit.

But AnchoR had no time to brood, nor was in the mood to hesitate as she crawled on the floor towards the heat source.

It was obvious–that it was the first time AnchoR used the ‘Steel Weight’.

As stated, it was truly a final gambit, and the objective of it was that just in case–when her ‘stored power was reduced to zero’, she had more than enough power to move.

–In fact, she did not know how many seconds she could run on after using that.

Her rational mind as a combat machine was stating that despite this, the ‘battle results’ were not too bad.

With less than 7% of the stored power, the amount of damage she caused on this ‘target’ was 18.2 times more than the activation of her 12th gear. Also, based on the current information she had, if she were to shift to number 11–her power would have run out when she destroyed the initial armor.

However, AnchoR’s ‘heart’ was yelling wildly–I don’t know about that.

(…If I can’t destroy ‘such a thing’…then..wh-why am I–)

She swung her fist as she lamented.

She realized that her remaining left arm could not bear the pressure and get wrecked, and destroyed everything she saw.

–It was meaningless.

A free will–a heart, was the activation key, but she could not protect the ones her heart wanted to protect, and then–AnchoR cursed at her creator.

(…Why, did you…crea, te…An…choR…!?)

–Tell, me…

She wailed out with a voice that just would not come out, and continued forward.

–…

Her two arms were no longer present. Her left leg was melted, and her remaining right leg appeared to be dulled.

The number of power plants she destroyed was –10008.

(…Another…25…more…)

–It was impossible.

Her power was depleted to a point where she reverted back to actual time, and opening the armory was already a difficult thing for her.

Assuming that even if she could draw a weapon–she had no hands to use them.

Her sensors were all malfunctioning, there was noise in her vision–but…

(–!?)

There was barely some heart vision left within her,, and she captured a reaction.

AnchoR clearly saw a block approximately 200m away from her, a gathering of heat at that place.

She gave up on her dejected heart, and the cold hearted battle machine began to establish an assumption.

If the main cannon of this weapon drew its energy from the coils and ‘gathered’ it all for a shot,

If she was to destroy the heat source gathered there, she could certainly prevent the cannon strike–!

(–Please, break apart!!)

AnchoR grimaced in a prayerful manner.

She callously exerted all her energy from her number 1–towards the right leg that was partially wrecked.

She did not think about how to land, and all she thought of was to shoot through the wall like a cannon.

At that moment–AnchoR Realized.

The heat source within her vision remained still.

That indicated that–her objective time was about to expand again.

–This will be my last activation, AnchoR thought.

She smiled.

With her one remaining right leg, AnchoR accelerated in this time gap.

–The damaged body rubbed against the space. Once she was sure that her body heat was rising again–that fact alone put her at ease.

–The acceleration succeeded. This body could still move.

Certainly, it was like a candle burning the last of its wick, looking extremely dazzling.

The recoil caused by the impact of kicking through the space melted the remaining right leg, and it fell off.

Her expanding senses felt that the wall was exceptionally far away.

A tremendous impact.

It was like a cannon. The scorching, burning AnchoR crashed through the wall, and entered the block behind the wall. However, at this moment, she lost control and speed, and before she could distinguish up from down, AnchoR landed haplessly and heavily against the wall opposite.

She was bouncing on the floor like a puppet with its strings severed.

However–

(It's…not…over…)

Despite losing her limbs, AnchoR's functions were yet to cease.

She lifted her neck with rigid motions, looking around.

–Over there was a hall reminiscent of a temple or a church.

The center space was buried by gears of all sizes, the center of the floor lifted, expanded into a dome.

Located over there was a massive cylinder with numerous shafts, bearings, spheres–a crystal coil of a glass spiral that stored power.

(…If I destroy…that thing…)

AnchoR summoned all of her remaining will, and moved,

She curled her frame, and ended up moving forward like a slug.

–It hurts.

It hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts–

The signals from her wrecked sensors put off her thoughts, and anguish tormented her entire body.

Why must an automata–a combat machine, feel pain in the first place…?

Right when she was thinking of this pointless question–

–AnchoR's entire body was riddled with impacts, lots of hole perforated on her.

An old man's voice could be heard from above.

"…How unbecoming. Do you not feel ashamed to be 'Y's masterpiece?"

Gennai Hirayama–AnchoR's vague consciousness realized this, at least.

But her body was about to break apart, and she could not move her vision at all.

"Or is it…that electromagnetic technology is unexpectedly potent on 'Y's automata?"

She could not move.

Could not move could not move could not move, error, stop, error, error, error–

"I see. Perhaps that is the case. You did not make it–the command to fire the main cannon was entered."

–Error.

"Soon, it will fire–you lose."

Gennai looked down at the writhing inheritance of 'Y', saying,

"Speaking of which…, I did expect this in the first place; I do apologize for this

outdated line–”

Gennai continued on in bemusement, and raised the handgun in his right hand.

The gun with an electrode embedded was not a gear gun.

“This is a portable railgun meant to deal with ‘Y’s inheritance–all of you… personally, I do not hope for it to be effective in any way, but it appears that it is better to be prepared.”

Saying that, Gennai aimed at the target.

The gun was pointed at the head of the writhing AnchoR.

–A gunshot.

The supersonic bullet that was accelerated by electricity–was fired as this sound was discharged.

“Connection’s complete! Marie!”

“I’m done here too! Activating it now. Everyone, get ready to retreat!”

–73 minutes, 52 seconds.

That was the moment Naoto and Marie controlled the grids next to Akihabara.

That was a great beyond human knowledge, an accomplishment not out of God’s hands–but out of humans.

For within such a short time, the duo created a new circuit for the severely damaged ‘Heaven’s Pillar’.

Assuming that even if there was a detailed blueprint, it would take a week to understand the structure.

But even so–the time limit passed without mercy.

Vermouth yelled sarcastically,

“No need for any prep! Let’s just scamper and jump out from that holee! Are we

going to greet the military first before leaving? Look at them sending us off from so close!”

He said as he fired the gun over the barricade.

The ‘military’ in front of him, dated machines and weapons, were closing upon him.

Houko did not sound optimistic–but Marie felt that there were still soldiers amongst the remaining Tokyo ‘military’ who had some spine.

They were the remnants of the Imperial Escorts and the soldiers rushing in from the other grids.

They began their assault on the fortress soon after 50 minutes passed, before they could assemble their forces fully.

From a military standpoint, they committed a critical error of sending in waves after waves–

But for Marie’s side, it was a tough battle, for RyuZU and AnchoR were not present, and they had to defend the base through Vermouth in his prosthetic and the heavy-armed automata Halter.

The duo blocked the incoming, desperate forces, and one would have to laud their efforts.

But for Naoto–no, everyone felt worried.

The limit had already passed. It was already two minutes past the next firing moment Naoto mentioned.

Naoto did say that it would be 72 minutes ‘earliest’. Perhaps it would take more than 80 minutes–or perhaps it could be fired at this moment.

But Naoto was more worried about–

“Damn it–please, AnchoR, RyuZU…”

Perhaps the delay of two minutes was out of AnchoR or RyuZU’s sacrifice.

But he hoped that these two minutes were not earned with the biggest sacrifice in his life–

On one hand, Marie with busy with the final adjustments during this time, and at the same time, yelled at Houko,

“You hear me!? We’re going to heat up Grid Akihabara to 2,000 Degrees Celsius! Heat up the surroundings of that weapon to 30,000 Degrees!”

–*Am I sane?* Marie wondered.

She was more terrified of what she said than anyone else.

But considering that she had to destroy that weapon, she felt that the temperature was too low–Marie shook her head.

“The surrounding is heating up, and it’ll be done soon–but it’ll take around 30 seconds for the frame of Grid Akihabara to be demagnetized! After 30 seconds Houko, please use that terminal to give the command. The bypass will break, and the temperature will lower.”

“Yes–I understand.”

Houko nodded in response to Marie’s instructions.

Naoto yelled impatiently.

“Hey, Marie! Aren’t you done yet!? Hurry up!”

“Got it! Right now–”

Marie yelled, and right when she was about to proceed with the final step.

Suddenly…she was tentative.

It was true–that she learned.

She gained the recognition of things she probably would not have known of. She gained the ability to see what she could not see.

She accepted that she was not a genius, and decided to become a genius.

But despite that, no, because of that–she was just a human.

Her fingertip was holding the trigger that could possibly destroy the world.

…Is it really alright? Did I not make a mistake? Am I being too conceited?

It's the first time I'm doing this, working on my instincts, an unprecedented mechanical construct.

I never tested it–no, it's impossible not to fail here.

But–if I fail, Tokyo, this country will fall.

I get the feeling that I might fatally affect this planet.

With this fingertip of mine–I might become the human that would kill the most humans in history.

Her teeth were rattling, the sensation on her fingertip vanished.

The tense, agitated feeling scorched her mind, her thoughts unable to make a breakthrough, and she felt she could faint at any given moment.

–There's no doubt. This is the right thing to do.

No matter how she tried to convince herself, the fear she had showed no signs of abating.

Suddenly, she felt skeptical.

–What were those guys thinking at first when they started the coup d'etat?

They did do something that could have potentially destroyed the world. What drove them to–

"…Hey Marie, hurry up. What are you dab…ah, need a toilet break?"

I see–Marie understood.

Once she understood, she found that the matter was terrifyingly simply.

"This is the second time now. I'm going to kill you afterwards–!!"

–It was rage.

In her fury, Marie smashed the enter key.

At that moment–the 'Heaven's Pillar' let out a hum of a throbbing.

Would it succeed or fail–Marie left those thoughts aside, and stood up.

This should be enough IT should be able to stand.

That's how 'Y' did this–those two units are proof. That's good enough!

She turned her head around, and found Naoto happily tapping at the terminal.

"Alright–! Now then, you're in the way, so back down now♪"

A clear tapping sound echoed.

And with the impact and boom akin to that of a massive explosion, the air let out a howl on the other end of the barricade.

The winds blew the 'military', becoming a tornado in the passage that let out a deep howl hitting the inner walls.

–This was a downburst on a very small scale.

Following that were keyboard sounds,

"Everyone ! Let's escape–from the hole on the floor–!!"

Naoto yelled,

At that moment, there was an upstream from the massive hole on the floor,

And in the face of the typhoon-like winds, Halter said,

"…Hey Naoto. The hole on the floor…so what?

"We're jumping down, of course. What else?"

"Any parachute?"

"None–that's why I summoned the winds."

Naoto stood by the hole as the winds roared, saying,

"A freefall from here, and we'll be able to ride the wind and land below–I guess."

"…Guess?

"It's fine, fine, really. I say that we can do it. It's just a mindset issue. Don't give up, uncle."

"…Are you kidding me? Well, I didn't ask you how we're going to retreat at first–but this has to be a lie, right?"

Halter groaned. One could hear from his tone that if it was his original cyborg body, he probably would have slapped his bald head.

The distance between their location and the ground was approximately 60km.

At this height, even Vermouth or Halter's machines could not possibly escape unscath, let alone Naoto and Marie who were of human flesh and blood.

But Vermouth patted Halter's body lightly, and leaped into the air,

"I'm making my move first! Let's rrrrrooooo–!"

The yell was contorted due to the Doppler effect.

Halter's sensors clearly picked up that Vermouth's body was decelerating as he rode down the massive winds, gliding to the floor.

Naoto, who pricked his ears to listen too, said,

"Alright, looks like it succeeded. Then, I can fly–!!!"

He yelped, and jumped into the air.

After that, Halter seemed to have given up and he jumped down from the side of the hole.

Finally, Marie was the only one left, and she turned to her good friend beside her, saying,

"Now then–I'll leave the rest to you, Houko."

"–Yes, I shall indicate all of you as high profile criminals. Do relax."

Houko smiled as she answered.

This probably would be the last time they would meet–so Marie thought.

The Princess of a country and a savage terrorist–there probably would not be a direct chance for them to meet again.

From henceforth, their paths would never meet, for they would walk down different paths.

I don't regret this decision, but, just a little–right when marie was thinking of this, and feeling melancholic…

Houko raised her left hand at Marie.

She was wearing a silver watch on it.

"_"

Marie smiled, and began running off.

The palm of her close friend was dangling in front of her, and as they passed, with the sound of a hit–

Marie

At that moment, Marie leaped out from the edge of the hole,

Later on, the ‘military’ regrouped, barged through the barricade, and charged in.

“Wha–”

A brief voice of surprise was blurted out.

The supersonic bullet accelerated by electricity–stopped in the air.

Two sharp scythes reached out, blocking the bullet.

A girl in black dress spoke with a clear singing-like voice,

“It is the servant’s duty to obediently follow the Master’s orders. And also–”

The black scythe spun along with the words.

Then, Gennai’s right hand that was wielding the right hand was severed, flying into the air.

“….It is the older sister’s responsibility to take care of the little sister, and stop her from being too reckless.”

Saying that, the girl–RyuZU, bowed with an elegant motion.

On the other hand, Gennai, whose arm was lopped off, looked utterly confounded, his face contorted.

It was not due to the pain of losing his arm.

“–Impossible…why did it not fire–!?”

But because the impact of the main cannon primed to be fired did not reach him.

And while Gennai showed no restraint in his emotions, RyuZU sneered, answering,

“–I came here through the hole my sister opened–and in the meantime, severed approximately 18 of movements with this meager power of mine. Looking at how your gaudy expression is right now, that if your head is lopped off and put in an arts gallery as an exhibit titled ‘imbecile’, I suppose I did something that was of ill will to you–this truly is a blissfulness akin to ascending to the Heavens.”

"…Sis…ter…why…?"

Upon hearing the voice voice that was filled with static, RyuZU turned her vision down.

Right below her was the sight of AnchoR, so thoroughly damaged, her limbs lost.

RyuZU frowned as she saw that–and abruptly swung the black scythe.

Bam!

The scythe swung at with pace, hitting AnchoR hard on the head.

The latter's body stopped breaking apart, reverting back to being that of a young girl.

"…It hurts…uu…you hit me…sister…"

AnchoR, so worn out, twisted her body, inadvertently snivelling.

AnchoR did not realize the change within her.

She did not know that the moment she was hit, the black scythe of her older sister accurately cut off the Balance Wheel of the 'Perpetual Gear', stopping her 'Steel Weight'–if the severed part was just a little off, she probably would not be able to move again.

Without letting her little sister realize the close shave that happened, RyuZU nonchalantly replied,

"–Yes, I did remind you that if you had no intention of returning, I would punish you."

"Ah…ahhn…uu"

AnchoR realized the bad state she was in, and let out a little groan.

RyuZU watched on with a smile, and then followed it up with a grim expression.

Gennai, holding his arm and breathing erratically, bemoaned,

"…I couldn't win after all…?"

"Against who? You never did lose to anyone."

The topaz eyes were giving off a snide glint.

With elegance and spiteful mockery, RyuZU bowed like a posh lady, saying,

“For you who had already admitted defeat to yourself right from the beginning, it was really unbecoming of you to have the misconception that you were fighting against Master Naoto, and I really do hope that you could have shrank this grave misunderstanding to a portable level, at least.”

She paused.

“–I should have caught up to AnchoR with ‘Mute Scream’, but there are two reasons why I did not do that. Thus, I do have to require you to apologize to me for having to endure your uncouth eyes.”

As to be expected, Gennai did not move.

But RyuZU did not mind as she knelt down beside AnchoR.

“First off, to bring AnchoR back.”

Once AnchoR entered ‘Steel Weight’, the initial burst of speed was something not even ‘Mute Scream’ could match up to.

But as long as she continued with the self-destructive actions, her speed would naturally slow down.

If RyuZU was to accelerate and hit AnchoR at that moment, the impacts of moving things under different time axis could have damaged AnchoR.

Thus, RyuZU did not show up, but immediately gave chase once AnchoR jumped down. She went straight for the little sister who caused so much devastation–but even so, it took her quite some time.

–*And also,* she continued,

“Secondly, I do not wish for you to die while unconscious. I really cannot allow myself to do such a merciful act”

With a beaming smile, RyuZU indicated this, and sensed a change.

The surrounding temperature was rising.

“–Thank goodness, AnchoR.”

"….Eh…?"

Looks like she has yet to realize, RyuZU nodded quietly in her heart.

–It was thanks to AnchoR that Naoto and the others lived on, and managed to do it.

You shall be properly reward RyuZU quietly noted to AnchoR in her heart, and smiled, before saying to Gennai,

"Now then…as for this old body in a pitiful state, I can grant your wish and let you be cooked as it you–or perhaps I should say, that if possible, I do wish to see your flesh burned, your blood boil, and your eyeballs reduced to white filth as you die, until I reach my temperature limit–"

Saying this, RyuZU hugged AnchoR,

"But though this is really against my personal wish, Master Naoto commanded that killing is bad for AnchoR's emotional education, and a certain girl wishes to preside over your fate."

At that moment, the black scythe raced.

The weapons and equipment on Gennai were reduced to scrap. The black scythe then twisted like a whip, smacking the back of his head with the back of the blade.

"…!"

Naturally, Gennai passed out, and was nimbly picked up by RyuZU's scythe.

"…How filthy. There is a need to clean up later. I did use my fastest speed possible to shake off the blood and fat from sticking off when I chopped the arm off…but this is merely an issue of feeling. It will be a great help to me if you do not move."

RyuZU turned around.

She embraced AnchoR tenderly, and with the old man dangling, backtracked at full speed.

"Ahh, do pardon me if you are burned because we could not escape in time, for it shall be an accident."

A few seconds after RyuZU and the rest left the scene.

–A sun appeared in the center of Grid Akihabara.

The photosphere was at 2,000 Degrees Celsius–and the core was exceptionally hot, at 30,000 Degrees. The sun devoured the massive weapon along with Grid Akihabara, scorching the landscape, removing the magnetism–

Epilogue – 00:00 – Saver

Under the moonlight, the sounds of waves echoed quietly.

The place was Grid Ariake–a port city in Tokyo facing the outer sea/

There were port facilities built at the edge surrounding Grid Ariake, spinning in the completely opposite direction to go along with the slowly spinning Grid. In ancient times, this place was called–Odaiba.

The commotion during the day ensured that the port was devoid of people, and at a corner of Odaiba, inside a dock that was like a warehouse.

That was the rendezvous they had agreed to meet at beforehand, and at this moment–

“Aaaaaannnnnnnnnn~~ccccccccccchhhhhhhhhhhhooooooooooo——RRRRRR!?”

Naoto’s wail echoed throughout the dock, as though doomsday had arrived.

Hard to blame him however.

Right in front of his eyes was a thoroughly worn out and battered AnchoR, who lost her limbs and was only left with a frame.

Naoto dumped everything he had in his hands, and leaped towards AnchoR, lying down on the large platform.

Marie observed the situation from behind, and even she could not help but turn pale and gasp.

–That was a terrible amount of damage.

No matter how one might try to soften it–that was some ‘heavy damage’.

If it was an ordinary automata, it would certainly be scrapped without mercy. Considering the amount of time and effort to repair this damage, it might be

more efficient to build a new one–if it was just an **ordinary** automata.

Marie glanced at Naoto.

Naoto's hands were quivering as he touched AnchoR, nodding gently,

"…It's alright. Really, barely, any fatal wounds on you. I remember everything about your structure, AnchoR, even the wires. I'll–and Marie…will definitely be able to fix you…haaa…"

"Really…thank goodness?"

Naoto collapsed limply on the floor, and Marie too earnestly heaved a sigh of relief.

And suddenly–Marie realized that she did not have any difficulty dealing with this girl.

Right when she was feeling lost, Naoto lifted his face towards RyuZU,

"…Thanks RyuZU. Thanks for stopping AnchoR."

RyuZU bowed elegantly, replying,

"As the servant, this is to be expected. Also, this is for the sake of my **deluded** little sister."

"I'll patch you up too, RyuZU…it's tough being the older sister, isn't it?"

–In response to Naoto's words, RyuZU gasped quietly.

RyuZU herself took quite some damage when she entered the 'Yatsukahagi' to stop AnchoR–however, the reason why RyuZU was taken aback, was not because Naoto's ears picked up on that.

–Her exalted Master swore to repair her–for her master's 'continued growth', RyuZU, felt more delighted than the prospect of her being repaired, and again, she bowed.

"…So…rry…"

At that moment, AnchoR, in Naoto's arms, gave a weak voice.

Upon hearing the interrupted voice filled with noise, Naoto frowned, and Marie too looked down.

Before they could speak, AnchoR continued on,

“An, choR…couldn’t, destroy…even though…An-choR can only do this…”

–To obliterate the enemy, to destroy everything. That was her one reason to exist.

She defied the orders of her Master, Naoto, acted independently, and in the end–could not destroy at all.

Upon seeing this little girl lament with such eyes–Marie had an instinctive thought.

Her instincts however were yelling before her rational mind could: *No, that’s the wrong way to think about this…*

“…I want…an order…”

The flickering red eyes appeared to be holding in tears as they looked at Naoto and Marie.

Her words and expressions were akin to a perturbed, confused, teary young child, facing a mistake she could not salvage.

What she wanted was not an instruction or an order–but a punishment, a way to make up for her past misdeeds.

One had to wonder if Naoto realized this, but he spoke up,

“Alright, this is an order, AnchoR–”

Naoto told her directly,

“You can lift your head up high–and say ‘I worked hard, I want to be praised’.”

–AnchoR widened her eyes.

Her perturbed red eyes looked on unsteadily at RyuZU.

The latter merely closed her eyes silently, noting that she affirmed Naoto's words.

The damaged girl was gasping for breath as she muttered,

"…An-choR…worked hard…?"

"Yep! Can't find a girl more hardworking than you even if I try."

AnchOR was gasping for breath. And after a pause, those eyes were staring at Marie.

With a trembling voice, she asked,

"…Mama…will you…allow AnchoR…to ask for…praise?"

"_"

At that moment, Marie felt an impulse rising from deep within her heart.

And then, she realized–

–That she was no longer against this girl calling her 'mama'.

Marie reached out to touch AnchoR on the cheeks, felt the damaged artificial skin, and then, wrapped her arms behind AnchoR's neck, cradling her like a baby.

Her ears picked up the sound of a heart.

Marie felt disgusted with herself–for actually treating this–no, this child as an ordinary automata, a terrifying weapon of destruction, so nauseatingly disgusted. Such a small child went out to get herself battered all over, willingly, all just to protect them. Also, she did actually protect them–yet looked as though she would be crying at any given moment, wondering if she could be praised.

Was that merely an ordinary automata? Without a heart? Who cared? I'm sick of hearing it, go to hell, damn it.

"Thanks, AnchoR…it's been tough on you. You–really worked hard."

Saying that, Marie gave a wry smile, thinking, *I really don't want to admit this*–

But for some reason, she was able to understand Naoto–the emotions of that pervert who would propose to an automata.

Just an automata. Just a simulation–if she was to classify everything this way, and

stop thinking…

Then humanity, would merely be a simulation machine of protein and biological signals.

If one had to ask if there was a heart–then prove that the heart does exist."

"…Hiii…aaa…!!"

AnchoR shed a tear while remaining in Marie's clutches.

Naoto patted AnchoR on the head, and gave the latter a harsh look as he narrowed his eyes,

"Also, AnchoR, you're sorely mistaken about one thing. I got to give you a little scolding because of this."

"…Uh…eh?"

"You say that you 'only know how to destroy. AnchoR, you aren't that kind of kid."

Naoto said it so adamantly, and at the same time, AnchoR recalled–

–When I get back, papa will teach me–about myself which I don't know of–

And as RyuZU said, Naoto stated the answer,

"AnchoR, you're a smart kid who knows how to protect everyone, bring joy to everyone and have a smile. No matter how strong a girl like you is, **that's not violence**–that's 'power'.

–Violence and power. It seemed AnchoR did not understand the difference between them, as she blinked.

Upon hearing Naoto's words, Marie recalled,

"…'Trishula'–the symbol of power belonging to the God of Destruction Shiva. The Trident…"

This memory caused Marie to this. *There's no way Naoto should have any knowledge of such stuff*

Despite being ignorant of it, he understood–no, he realized.

“–The characteristics defining the ‘power’ of the God of Destruction are ‘willpower’, ‘knowledge’–and ‘action’. Only by having the three conditions is there the ‘correct power’, and that’s how he became one of the three deities…it’s an ancient Asian myth.”

“So AnchoR–you can use your strength based on your own will, right?”

“Ah…”

AnchoR gasped, and her eyes widened.”

“You’re a kind kid, a smart kid, AnchoR. The power to destroy–is also the power to repair. It’s just like how you need to–‘accurately break things down’ when repairing a clock. That’s not violence. That’s a powerful ability.”

Naoto told AnchoR this with a gentle smile on his face.

“RyuZU did say that too, right? You got to listen to your older sister, you know? AnchoR, you’re an anchor–a force to limit. That’s why ‘Y’ gave you this name, right?”

Hearing this, AnchoR’s eyes flickered, her lips quivering, inadvertently letting out a voice.

Again, she faced Marie, and tentatively asked,

“…AnchoR…isn’t a bad kid? Mama…you aren’t scared, of AnchoR?”

At that moment–Marie felt really ashamed of herself.

She was seen through–the notion was that she was always scared of this girl, always thinking of this automata girl as a weapon, her heart dead set on setting a line between them.

–And so she, Marie, went along with her feelings and kissed AnchoR on the cheek. She then moved her lips onto the eyelids, the reddened cheeks, and then, was unable to hold back her passionate sobbing as she told AnchoR,

“How can I possibly, be scared of you…! AnchoR–”

–…

“Hey Missy, do you know? Even if it’s a movie, those tearful scenes can be rather annoying if dragged on for 10 minutes.”

Hearing that knock, Marie wiped her tears, and angrily turned her head around.

Vermouth poked his head in from the half-ajar door, knocking on the wall.

“Time to get to the next scene, shall we? For example, how the hell do we get out from here, or something?”

“–Of course by cruiser. If you get sick of it, don’t watch it.”

“Oh, like that can do. We just took a stroll in the air, and I was hoping that we’ll get a stroll on the sea! Now then–the upcoming scene will be us leaving the dock leisurely and our cruiser getting holes shot through them, right?”

Vermouth laughed sarcastically–but those eyes of his were absolutely serious.

The fact that the savage terrorists escape was probably known by all.

Leaving aside the land, air and sea routes–no, considering how that massive weapon appeared, it was likely that the deep underground was sealed off too.

If any suspicious cruiser was to casually appear, it would not be strange for it to be shot down without a warning.

But Naoto in turn responded to Vermouth’s doubt,

“Relax. In about–another 46 minutes? There’ll be a random tornado happening in this area. We’re going to charge through ‘that space’ during that time.”

“Oh, that can work. So who came up with the idea?”

“It’s Naoto of course. This is what a madman will come up with.”

“Of course it is, haha! As to be expected of your thinking, brat! I guess I’ll fuc–”

While Vermouth was about to let out a really vulgar joke, he was slapped down by RyuZU’s scythe.

After a moment, the cruiser shutter opened.

A white ocean cruiser drifted in from the sea.

The cruiser was rather large, equipped with a kitchen, cabins, and even a simple workshop.

It docked without a hitch, and two men got off from it.

“…Hah, I guess I’ll stick with being human-shaped after all.”

“Hello, Professor Marie, I was a little late. Sorry to keep you waiting.”

Getting off that cruiser was Halter, now back to his prosthetic self, and Conrad.

Marie went up to greet the duo, answering,

“Don’t say that now, Professor Conrad. You really took care of us here…a lot of things happened, and I nearly belittled you as a result. I might say though that I’m still having issues about it.”

Marie said with her eyes half opened.

However, Conrad seemed to omitted the parts detrimental to him, beaming,

“No no. I did benefit a lot on this job. It really was filled with excitement.”

Marie gave a vague smile, and then, gave Halter and glance, before asking,

“…But I have to say, you really did manage to get a full cyborg body to replace it.”

“Why yes. Because of this commotion, this country was for a moment in a state of no governance. I got quite a few stuff too, you know?”

Conrad noted cheerfully.

–Benefit a lot. That’s probably not just referring to experience or this cyborg–

Marie gave a rigid smile. However, she could not let Halter escape while connected to the 'Black Tortoise'. It really was unspeakable that she was begrudgingly requesting others for help.

"It's a lot **crude** compared to the cyborg body from before. Doesn't feel stable… and the face–I hope there's a way to change it in the future."

She said as she caressed Halter's face, whose body looked entirely different from before.

His current appearance was young and handsome, his physique seemingly thinner because of the difference in muscle gear

The only common point between them was the bald head.

And also, he was wearing sunglasses to go along with his grey suit, the difference so stark it was as though a stranger was impersonating him.

But even so–Marie shrugged,

"Well, any current cyborg build will look **crude** compared to the 8th generation of the Breguets. We can count ourselves lucky to be able to get a replacement now–and your appearance is exposed. I guess it's better not to go back to how you look dnow."

"Are you silly? That's the face before he's turned into a cyborg, crafted out bg,

ased on the estimated aging process. You're just going to give up because he's a fugitive now? Don't look now on a nice middle aged man here!"

Halter rubbed his bald head unhappily. Vermouth interrupted from the side.

"And speaking of which, I…don't get one of those bodies? I'm thinking of going back to be a guy now."

"How about you remain like that for the rest of your life?"

"Hey bitch–this thing's not even a cyborg! Aren't you just scaring me now!"

Vermouth yelled back, but suddenly, he noticed his crotch, saying,

"–But to be honest, I'm very concerned about this baby at my crotch. In times of emergency, the foreskin."

"Relax Vermouth! I'll get you some really ugly cyborg onto it! I suddenly

remember that there's something really filthy in front of me!"

Marie looked delighted–and appeared to be ready to modify all over Vermouth's body. The latter looked away, and scanned his surroundings.

"Hm–well, since we're all clear on the escape cruiser and our methods, can I ask one last thing–?"

Saying that, Vermouth turned to look at one corner of the dock.

With him leading on, everyone present turned to look at an old man, who had been placed aside.

–Gennai Hirayama, the 'real' mastermind–behind this entire sequence of events. His severed arm was crudely treated, and he was not tied up merely seated quiet on the chair.

"…I say, Missy, why is this old man over here?"

Vermouth and Halter both gave some really inorganic killing intent. But–

"Eh? I said we can cook him in the pot, you know? But we can use a drum nearby–"

Naoto said as he looked around. Marie ignored him, answering,

"I requested RyuZU this before the operation. I wanted to capture the mastermind alive if possible–"

Upon hearing this, Halter slapped his own forehead.

He looked down at the girl who was in her teens, saying,

"…I'll tell you, Missy, it's normal to have your conscience pricked when you kill, but there'll be trouble if you keep this guy alive. Do you understand?"

Right–if they wanted to create an 'evil' that all belonged to a 'single criminal cell', it would be trouble for them to leave witnesses. Luckily–though Marie had no intention of looking so optimistic, but except for Gennai, all of the old Shiga 'military' were murdered.

In that case–

"Kill this guy, and everything will end. Do you want me to handle this for you? I'm as used to eliminating anyone and disposing his corpse as I am to drink a cup of

tea. Give me ten minutes, and I'll choose 6 different methods of death for you, from a quick one to the most torturous one, you know?"

…So these are 'veterans' on the battlefield'? Marie watched the two men give a frosty atmosphere, and sighed,

"…I'll say that it's a lie if I say that I'm so completely against burning him–"

Saying that, Marie gave Naoto a stern glare.

Naoto, who was half-heartedly–no, dead serious on looking around for a drum, sensed that look, and turned around,

"…Alright, if you want me to say something serious, I'll say it–"

Naoto paused.

"FIrst, even if this old man is left alive, I guess it's fine. Or I'll say–he'll end up killed anyway."

Upon hearing this, Marie showed a skeptical look.

On the other hand, Halter, Vermouth, Conrad and RyuZU all looked enlightened.

"–I see. That is really the case."

"If there's news that there are survivors of the Shiga 'military' involved in the coup d'etat, we won't be the only ones in trouble."

"No matter the testimony, he will be deemed as one of us, and the verdict will end up being a death penalty for him."

"It probably will save us all some time to silence (assassinate) him. Certainly, there will not be any issue."

Upon hearing the trio of men, a machine, and Naoto who did not seem to say anything, Marie's face tensed.

–Why are these guys always coming up with such foul-hearted thoughts right from the beginning?

Naoto continued to insist.

"If I have to state another reason–this old man seemed to be aiming for me alone, that's one. If I left him alone, it'll be like letting AnchoR and RyuZU kill someone,

and I'm pissed about that, so that's too. And if I have to say a third reason–"

Naoto looked down at the old man who remained seated, saying,

"I think there's 'someone else' behind this old man"

–What…?

Right when the group was frowning away, Halter asked, voicing the thoughts of everyone else present.

"It's true that there's a lot of things I don't get–but the basis of that is?"

"Eh, well…someone who really hates 'Y' until his head is off–won't deliberately make use of 'Y's inheritance that is AnchoR, right? Also, there's none of the electromagnetic technology he's so proud of."

Upon hearing this, everyone gasped.

Marie, and even Halter and Vermouth, 'war-hardened' men, missed out on this fact.

Assuming that AnchoR was at full power, it was easy for her to destroy the 'Yatsukahagi'–that would be the most ironic thing to this man's actions, no?

Gennai took these stares, and lifted his head.

His face, including white hair and beard, was as pale as paper, only the metallic-colored eyes were filled with malicely, blazing with moisture.

"–Ahh, impressive."

His voice was aloof, and hoarse.

"How impressive you are until the very end, 'Y'–damned God."

Naoto exhaled in annoyance.

"Aren't you done with talking…I have a name, and it's called Naoto Miura. Did you just create a ruckus because your dementia rocked your bonkers or something?"

“It’s impressive that he’s trying to destroy the world because of his dementia.”

Marie sarcastically noted with her eyes half opened. And then, she looked down at Gennai, asking,

“…You kept calling Naoto ‘Y’. For what reason?”

Hearing Marie’s doubt, Gennai slowly lifted his face.

In the face of those ominous grey metallic eyes looking up at her, Marie inadvertently backed off.

“–Marie Bell Breguet. The young genius of a clockwork technician. Pearl of the Breguet family–I really am disappointed that you do not understand.”

“What…?”

Marie muttered, and Gennai looked away from her.

He then looked at the faces of Halter, Vermouth and Conrad in order, saying,

“…You probably should have made contact with ‘Y’. I suppose that you aren’t so dull-witted to not have any thoughts after seeing such magic, such irrationality.”

Finally, he met Naoto in the eyes, concluding,

“–This body is not human.”

“No no, seriously, what is this old man saying now?”

Naoto quickly retorted, but Gennai ignored him, continuing,

“–You probably saw it. This boy easily contorted and remodified the world. Do you really believe…that the one able to do such a thing is just an ordinary human, an ordinary technician?”

Marie gasped.

Halter, Vermouth and Conrad too scowled. Having witnessed that work that surpassed the realm of God, it really was impossible for them to dismiss the old man’s words as nonsense.

“And to me, this Clockwork Planet is full of doubts. It’s **impossible** for humans to recreate the world using gears…!”

Gennai remained seated on the chair, his voice husky as he continued,

“An impossible existence, an impossible technology. We aren’t sure if this world truly exist. In this situation, I think there’s a need to let ‘Y’ understand such despair and the limits of humanity–I’ll say that this is the motive.”

Saying that, Gennai leaned on the back of the chair.

He looked down, and looked at the right arm he lost.

“…I may have lost…but does this mean ordinary humans aren’t able to defy God? If you want to kill me, do so. This world is ultimately an illusion, just a created illusion created by that arrogant God who called himself human…I have no regret.”

Gennai calmly prompted.

His voice and tone was cold, weary, and thoroughly defeated.

“_”

If it had been, Marie thought.

If it had been a few days ago–when Akihabara was hit by the electromagnetic pulse, causing everything to spoil, perhaps she would have agreed with this old man’s words.

That despair, that feeling of mistrust, that impression that the whole world was merely an illusion, if back then–

–No, but now she understood.

That was not an illusion.

And with such belief and understanding, she spoke,

“–Stop joking around.”

Her words, more forceful and convicted than her voice, let slip.

Gennai lifted his face, his gloomy grey eyes filled with defiance as he glared at Marie.

But Marie did not back down.

–The world was certainly covered by an ‘illusion’.

Once this layer of illusion was peeled off the Earth, what was left would be–this ‘Clockwork Planet’.

Naoto Miura merely heard the sounds of the world after having peeled off the layers.

The present Marie understood this really well.

–The world allowed for paradoxes.

Common sense, existing concepts, current theories–those things were merely ‘illusions’ layered over the world.

To humanity at least, the universe was an epoch, physics was merely a cripple.

By changing viewpoints, RyuZU’s ‘Imaginary Gear’ and AnchoR’s ‘Perpetual Gear’ would exist without paradox, and there would be no doubt to them.

Back then, the world Marie saw–what Naoto showed by peeling off the layer of illusion from the world–everything was merely ‘nature’.

This world was an illusion, and yet at the same time, truly existed–it certainly was not some convenient spell.

Even the current gear technology, which Marie assumed to be wrong, was not a ‘completely different thing’ from the knowledge she possessed.

The difference was so miniscule, some minor things that appeared like an illusion–

–And because of this, Marie concluded. She was able to conclude.

The amazing thing was that the words she said were the same as the words Gennai heard.

“It’s up to you if you want to admit defeat and grumble over here. It’s your choice to think what you want, but–”

Hearing these words, Gennai’s eyes were widened to the limit.

Marie let out a sharp presence as she glared at the dull grey, metallic eyes, saying,

“You’re being too arrogant in your subjective words–who allowed you to speak for ‘humanity’!?”

And so,

“Don’t group us along with you. We haven’t despaired. We are different from you.”

The emerald eyes were burning with tranquil flames.

“Don’t you dare define our limits as human when you gave up yourself.”

Marie declared.

She knew that Naoto beside her was snickering away.

Gennai stared back grimly with a look of realization, lamenting,

“…I see. So there are two of ‘Y’.”

His lips were contorted into a sneering expression as he said this to Naoto and Marie.

“No matter how you two continue to exalt humanity, I will not agree with that–it is human nature to reach its limit. If you don’t learn and understand this before manipulating the ways of the world, how can you possibly call yourselves humans?”

Gennai’s eyes remained dull as he stared at their faces.

“No matter how unscrupulous we are, no matter how much we have to dirty ourselves, we’re going to repeat our failures over and over and over again with our ugly faces covered in dirt, harping over our minor victories; that is ‘humanity’–it’s the same even if we aren’t the ones winning.”

Saying this, Gennai paused.

“Yes, for example–that man is a perfect example of one.”

At that moment–

Within the dock, where only their talking voices could be heard, there was loud noises.

"What's going on–!?"

The crowd looked around in shock, and then immediately understood the reason.

The resonance communicator in the dock activated on its own.

–Someone hacked in from the outside.

And before anyone could move, the channel was connected.

"Hahaha–I suppose that will refer to me? Mr Gennai–"

–*Who's that?*

The voice of a man coming from the communicator caused everyone present to have the same doubt.

No, Gennai was the only one sneering away, staring at the communicator without a word.

Seeing Gennai's reaction, Marie had a hypothesis.

But before she could say it, the voice announced the answer,

"Ah, as for who I am–you'll understand if I say 'mastermind', right?"

"–!!"

Marie nearly shouted out loud.

The mastermind–**the one inciting Gennai from behind**, as Naoto hinted.

But it was unexpected that the other party would contact them like this.

And while they were unable to hide their surprise, he continued on nonchalantly,

"Oh, right! Before you show any shock, mind opening the window first?"

"…Window?"

Halter responded skeptically.

"It's not a trap at all. Now then, hurry up. You're going to miss it!"

His inscrutable, jovial voice–filled with malice, prompted them.

…There was a limit to how suspicious it could be.

Having realized that, both Marie and Naoto however exchanged glances–and nodded. Marie then quickly turned to open the rusted and sealed window lock, opening the window.

The seawater-flavored breeze grazed her cheeks. However–

“Don’t see anything…”

Right when Marie muttered this–

–A boom shook through the night sky, echoing.

Marie was nearly knocked down by this tremendous book, and in her panic, leaned out of the window to look up at the sky.

The source of the boom–**was something that broke through the sound barrier**

Marie’s eyes were fixed upon the machine that flew towards the sky.

–A tactical fighter jet?

There was a battalion of more than 20 units, flying towards the other end of the cloudless night sky, vanishing,

*Where are they going…no, more importantly–**there are weapons and machines I don’t know of?***

The moment Marie had this doubt, the mastermind answered,

“So how about it? Did you see it? –Those things that just flew by were the latest products of the Vacherons!”

“What…Vacherons…!?”

Marie turned her head from the window, letting out a terrified shriek. At the next moment–

–A flash turned the night completely white.

And a few seconds later, an ‘explosion noise’ incomparable to before rocked the atmosphere, sea and city.

The mastermind then squealed in delight over the communicator,

“Why yes–they predicted such a situation prepared an anti-electromagnetic weapon–and that’s one of them! That enemy is the half-destroyed ‘Yatsukahagi’, but nobody else knows of this fact other than you guys!”

Through those words, Marie understood.

In other words, the explosion from before–was that massive weapon getting crushed by the Vacheron weapons.

“This is the greatest exhibition of them all! Thank you for your assistance–eh? What you say?”

The voice from the communicator stopped, and then, followed up with some malicious laughter.

“Haha, I really want to thank you again. I’m hearing that at this moment, all the countries are coming in now!”

“You..!”

Marie hissed with a vengeful look.

At this time, with the threat of electromagnetic weapons clear for all to see, that they dealt with it–

The objective was obvious.

The declining fame of the Vacherons would rise accordingly…

With Japan trying to clean up the mess that was the situation, they could not stop the Enterprises from interfering..

But that meant–

“You guys–were aiming for that **right from the beginning**, right!?”

Marie shouted, quivering away as she was unable to express her rage.

Anti-electromagnetic weapon? There was no way they could have developed it and completed it on this day.

Something they prepared just in case? What a joke–they prepared it 'just for this thing'!

This group of people were secretly controlling the politics, creating crisis, and intended to end matters as it was. The anti-electromagnetic weapons were for this purpose!

They merely did it–to promote their own products…!

However, the mastermind let out muffled laugh, his voice answering Marie's growl,

"Hahaha, how is that possible!? I really will like to thank you for thinking so highly of us, but I can't see the future. *This is merely one of the good predicted outcomes being used for all its worth*–however…"

He paused.

"Even if I can't see the future, your actions are still within my control, you know? Hahaha–!!"

–*This guy…,*

Marie was extremely agitated, her body increasingly chilly–her fists shivering due to fear.

What they did–even that kind of miracle was capitalized for something.

However, with a sharp glare at the communicator, Naoto said,

"Stop spouting that obvious 'lie' with that disgustingly mysterious voice, old man."

"Oh–?"

…*A lie?* Marie turned towards Naoto, who continued,

"How's it possible for you to say that everything we did–was all within your expectations? If us snatching AnchoR is part of your expectations, aren't you being too kind here?"

–*That's true.* Marie gulped.

She was nearly bluffed by this mastermind's facade.

Naoto was right. Since this man sent AnchoR to protect Gennai and the others, given that they knew about that ridiculous fighting ability, was there any reason to give her up?

"I suppose you wanted to sink the capital, start a war, and strike big money–? No…"

Naoto noted, and turned his head around. Marie recalled what she heard in Kyoto a few weeks ago. She interrogated a certain military Technical Force member, who yelled,

–"You guys caused that incident in Amsterdam 2 years ago, right!?"–

The rumors of deliberately destroying a Core Tower to analyze the technology– was that…

Halter sighed as he muttered from the side,

"…I see. If the Coup d'etat did succeed, you could raise your prestige as a supporter. If it failed, you can promote weapons used to fight against that electromagnetic weapon. If it worked, the Capital will fall, and you'll analyse the technology and start wars, selling weapons and letting your business prosper– such typical scumbags."

"Hahaha, it's an honor to be praised by you. Or that is what I should be saying, no?"

Halter's curses were replied with mocking from the other side, and Marie was dumbfounded.

…What's going on? What kind of mindset allowed him to do such a lowlife thing?"

Who exactly–at that moment, Marie followed her instincts, and yelled,

"You're–**not of Vacheron**, right–who are you!?"

The logic followed up a tad later, and she yelled.

This man who called himself the mastermind sounded as though he belonged to the Vacherons–**but it was impossible**.

The Five Enterprises truly had a tremendous influence.

Normally, on this planet that run on clockwork technology, and since the clockwork technology was the pulse, the 5 Enterprises, who controlled the technology and had the authority, had power that exceeded that of the ISS. However, there were only a few people who could carry out such plans–in two ways.

First, it had to be someone of the position equivalent to the leaders of the 5 Enterprises, and–

Second, that person would never consider the risk of such matters being exposed–madness.

At the very least, even the Vacherons could not come up with a conspiracy to sink a city, analyze the technology, and incite wars.

Even if they did tolerate such evil–this really was not something an Enterprise would give the go sign for, considering the risk they would take if their objectives were exposed.

However, the one who called himself a mastermind answered Marie's question with a mocking tone,

"Hahaha–who am I? I never thought of this question before. Besides, I hardly had the chance to introduce myself."

The mastermind cheerfully noted.

And then, before Marie could growl, the mastermind asked,

"Speaking of which, I do want to ask–do you know what the outside world calls you? 12 hours after footage of you dominating the Palace was leaked, and now there's nobody on Earth who doesn't know about you–"

He then continued with a chuckle,

"–The 'Second Upsilon, said to be the second coming of 'Y'! Everyone said that 'Y' in the past came to save the world, but this time, he showed up to destroy–! Oh, such a cool name! A nameless person like me is really jealous of it!"

However, He then switched to a peaceful tone, continuing,

"–'Y' will 'never surpass X'–don't you think that it's a relic of the past? That's why I shall name myself with a cooler name–"

Saying that, the mastermind paused,

And he declared,

“–I’m ‘Ω’. Of the same line of business as you, the real deal of course..”

…Marie remembered that name to heart–Omega. That probably was a name he randomly thought of, but it did not matter.

For her soul was telling her that this was the enemy they had to defeat.

The mastermind ignored Marie’s determination as he continued to play dumb, saying,

“But you can just take the old fashioned route and think of us as the ‘evil organization’. And just to add, it’s a pity that Unit 04 was stolen, but it’s just a weapon after all. Since we know that it’s ‘something that is tagged ‘perpetual’ but ultimately able to be destroyed, I lost interest in it. If you don’t mind such an ancient scrap, you can take it all you want! Hahaha–!!”

While the man who called himself Omega continued to laugh out loud, his voice filled with pure evil–

“–Shut that annoying mouth of yours, damned bastard!”

Naoto agitatedly raised his voice to shout.

And for some reason, he glared at the ceiling, howling,

“–Stop hiding at **such a place** yapping away. Come down and say the same thing to me face to face if you dare! I’m going to punch your face in!!”

–After an instance

“Haha–“

Omega laughed. The laughter was so sudden, so shrill,

“–Haha, HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA–!!”

That mad laughter dragged on, and Omega chimed in,

“I really couldn’t believe it until I confirmed it myself. I see that you really can

‘hear anything’, *young Naoto*! This is the only way to explain everything, but I never thought such a ‘power’ really exists–oh my, the world is so interesting, isn’t it, young Naoto!?”

And in response to Omega’s words, Marie thought “this is bad”, and regretted it all.

The reason why this man contacted them and rattled on for so long–

Was to affirm–their ‘trump card’ Naoto’s ability!

Omega continued cheerfully,

“I do apologize for saying something overboard, young Naoto. I really do have a lot of interest in you, and you’re the one I want to analyze more than the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’. As an apology–to be honest, the analysis of the ‘Perpetual Gear’ is incomplete, and I really couldn’t bring myself to give up on Unit 04, so I shall leave it to you. Sorry to taunt you.”

“Like hell it is! AnchoR had always been mine. Go die already!”

“Naoto! Why are you…!”

Marie growled. Even if it was out of defiance, they lost out by revealing their ‘trump card’. However–

“…The hatch’s closed.”

“Eh…?”

These sudden words from Naoto caused Marie to shut up.

Naoto continued to give a hostile glare at the ceiling, saying,

“…There’s a massive stealth bomb around 20,000m tall. If it’s a bomb, RyuZU’s functions can handle it. But I just heard the sound of the resonance cannon AnchoR used before.”

Hearing those words, Marie widened her eyes,

“–Resonance Cannon? How is it possible to have a Resonance Cannon with more than 20,000m range!?”

That range was beyond three times that of the realistic–no, theoretical limit. However–

“So it’s something similar to a Resonance Cannon? I can conclude that it’s the other voice of that guy.”

Saying this, Naoto took a breath, and continued looking up into the sky with disgust, saying,

“**“Guess where I am. If you get it correct, I’ll spare you. If you get it wrong, I’ll kill you”**–that’s how it is.”

The significance of those words caused Marie to be so startled she was short of breath.

It was ridiculous–Marie swallowed back what she nearly blurted out without thinking.

No matter how ridiculous it was, how unbelievable it was–if Naoto said so, that had to be the case.

And thus, if that was the case, in other words, they just–

Nearly got killed at the last moment–and ‘remained alive because they were spared’.

That probably was because it was–‘more beneficial to them’.

For it would not be a handicap to keep them alive–and at the same time, they could be used.

A mocking sneer rang from the communicator, seemingly awaiting Marie to make this conclusion,

“–Splendid, correct answer. As expected of you, young Naoto!”

“Y-you dare look down on us…!”

Marie’s eyebrows were raised, her voice quivering in anger. The unbearable shame caused the blood to rush up her head.

When was the last time she was toyed so brazenly like this

It seemed the mastermind even thought of Marie’s anger as some form of

entertainment as he continued,

“And thanks to you, I’m able to move more easily than ever! My dear international terrorist cell Second Upsilon, please continued to put on a show and let me continue to lie low–but young Naoto Miura, there are *two* misunderstandings I’ll like to correct you on, you know?”

A pause.

“Unit 04 being snatched away was *really within expectations*, actually. It would be impossible to explain the prevention of Kyoto’s collapse without some form of magic, so I chose the premier ‘bait’–haha, glad that you like it. It really is a precious chip, but an investment worth making!”

Hearing those words, Marie felt a chill up her spine.

That indicated–

That the enemy–really was aiming for Naoto, and lured him in.

When did it start–when did they really start planning, and to what extent?

“And secondly–I’ll spare you if you’re correct, kill you if you’re wrong…well, that’s the correct answer–“

But because of the following words, the chill became a definite fear of death.

“–Except for the one who got it correct, young Naoto, everyone else can die, you know?”

“–Get down–!!”

Naoto screamed.

Marie did so without thinking. She saw, within her flowing vision that Halter, Conrad and Vermouth did the same.

The ones who did not do so was RyuZU, preparing to fight–and the sneering Gennai.

And Gennai’s head–exploded.

"–!"

The blood and brains exploded, the smell of rust filled the place.

After a beat, another gunshot could be heard.

…We're sniped!

Marie gritted her teeth, and Naoto showed an anxious look as he turned around.

*This isn't good.*She thought. *The second shot*–

—

"……?"

The second shot isn't coming–?

On the rooftop of a tall building, where all of the port facilities in Grid Ariake could be seen clearly,

"Hah…never thought I'll be able to stay alive. I guess my luck does come in handy somewhere…though this is definitely work beyond my pay."

Karasawa joked, and easily spun the tool that was stabbed in.

A clank, the sound of intricate parts breaking.

Following that was gears spinning and missing, and the machine the size of a bicycle stopped.

THis machine was equipped with a black cowl and a long barrel, giving off a vague presence of violence.

–A sniping machine used for assassination.

Karasawa stabbed a tool through the thin armor to destroy the AI, sighed, and grumbled as he muttered,

"…I should say that this is work beyond that of my salary…well, I'll just think of it as interest for the 'favor' I once had. Looks like Professor Marie is safe now…ugh!"

He groaned softly, and held down his flank.

The crimson blood dripped between the gaps of his fingers.

"…This really is…will the insurance pay for this if I apply for work hazard…I guess not at all, haha–my workplace is too dark for anyone to stay in."

He managed to fight off the assassin, but was not able to remain unscathed.

His right wrist, coupled with some of his ribs, were fractured, and he took two shots to his abdomen.

He estimated that, having sustained such severe injuries, it would take him a month to fully recover.

His injuries were not serious enough to warrant becoming a cyborg…but his life would be at risk if he did not seek treatment early.

Karasawa's breathing was increasingly erratic given that he took such a severe injury.

"Got to think…where do I go next…"

This time, he really knew of something he should not have.

He managed to fight back against an assassin, but the same luck probably would not happen too often.

He had to quickly hide his existence–or he would require a certain person's protection.

For the time being, his only hope was…yes, look for the Princess? His experience in the 'Meister Guild' was that working in a field with a pretty, capable woman would be a cheerful one.

"Professor Marie…I guess she should be fine. I'm just a third rate character compared to them. They'll figure out a way to escape–woah, that's close."

Karasawa dragged back his nearly faded consciousness, and chuckled.

Then, he swallowed back the glob of blood rising up his throat.

"Ahh damn it, it's a heavy wound after all…before switching jobs, the nearest backalley doctor…"

Karasawa dragged his wounded body as he vanished in the darkness of Tokyo.

The sun was about to be submerged on the other end of the horizon.

And on the sea dyed red by the sunset, Marie laid on the chair on the deck.

The temperature was warm, the the sea breeze blowing from time to time very comforting.

She looked up through her sunglasses, and within the hue in the sky was the shadow of the 'Equatorial Spring' stretched across.

She tilted her neck slightly to the side, and found a man by the side of the cruiser, fishing.

While the man continued to turn his back on her, Marie called out,

"Halter, mind getting me some juice?"

"Sure, orange is fine, right?"

Marie nodded. Halter proceeded to take out a can of orange juice from the ice bucket beside him without looking, and threw it to the bag.

The juice can flew in an arc, and Marie caught it in mid-air, before proceeding to pull the ring.

It let out a relaxing fizzy sound.

She enjoyed the icy, sweet juice as she switched on the resonance radio placed on the side table.

The speakers aired some news report along with static.

"–We shall now report on the 'February 8 incident'. On the 10th of February, the criminal group–commonly known as 'Second Upsilon', attacked the Palace, took Princess Houko Hoshinomiya hostage and occupied the 'Heaven's Pillar'. Currently, their whereabouts remained unknown. Also, it was determined that the huge weapon used for this terrorist attack might have used electromagnetic technology. Countries around the world have began action in purchasing the latest anti-electromagnetic weapons from the Vacherons…"

Marie heard the report by the female anchorwoman, and snorted unhappily.

“So everything went according to that damned mastermind’s plans…”

“Not only that. Now every country has technology to fight electromagnetism–this basically means that they all start to doubt that the others have electromagnetic weapons.”

Halter’s back remained turned on Marie as he continued,

“It’s fine now, but once the commotion calms down, there’ll probably be something else that will trigger. If another conflict happens, those guys are going to earn money again.”

Hearing those words, Marie let out a gloomy sigh, and switched the radio channel.

The program on another channel was airing commentary.

“–In other words, I think it was Princess Houko’s brave actions that caused the terrorist attack to fail. If the ‘Second Upsilon’ did not hastily attack the ‘Heaven’s Pillar’, Grid Akihabara would not have lost control that led to the large weapon’s destruction.”

“–Speaking of Princess Houko, it was said that after the ‘military’ assault squad went in to save her, she commanded them and got down to resolve the situation…”

“–Yes, correct. Not everyone knows however that Princess Houko did obtain the license of a Gazelle when she went to Europe for studies. It can be said that because of the Princess’ command of the Royal Technical Force that they quickly dealt with the emergency, and that the damaged ‘Heaven’s Pillar’ could barely remain functional.”

Halter spoke with an optimistic tone.

“That Princess sounds as though she’s still doing well, I guess?”

“I guess. She’s already suited to be a leader, if not because of her position.”

Marie nodded, and recalled the report she heard in the afternoon.

–It was said that the damaged 'Heaven's Pillar' was to be investigated and repaired by the "Guild'. Also, all repair works in the Capital Circle has begun smoothly under the support of the other countries.

And so, Houko, who was saved, was treated as a hero who saved her country. The government completely lost the support of its people because of this incident, and one could imagine Houko having a huge influence on it.

Marie felt perked up once she knew her good friend would have a bright future in store for her, and continued,

"And that's quite some good acting…when she was interviewed, she dismissed this good friend in me as 'an egoist who acts on personal benefit, an arrogant person she cannot agree with'."

".–Most of it is probably true."

The retort from above caused Marie to immediately feel dejected.

Marie lazily got up, and turned around, saying,

"I'm so dejected now that you're saying it, and my killing intent is coming out now–oh main culprit Naoto?"

She turned her head towards Naoto, dressed lazily in a Hawaiian shirt to go with shorts and slippers–looked completely lethargic as he stood there.

Beside him was RyuZu, in a dress as usual, standing by as though she was an outsider.

And then–

"Ah, AnchoR! You're finally okay!?"

Marie saw the girl, AnchoR walk out from the cabin, and eased her expression as she greeted the girl.

"Ah, mama…"

AnchoR slowly approached her, smiling back.

Her body once lost its limbs, and even its frame was severely damaged. There were limbs attached to her for the time being.

…As expected Marie thought.

AnchoR was basically severely damaged to begin with.

Furthermore, the spare parts used on her body were unique, each of them different from the usual kind—it was impossible for this escaping yacht to have materials that could repair AnchoR.

Thus, AnchoR was attached to a prosthetic for automata, the parts obtained when Marie broke down the 'Black Tortoise' Halter was attached to and extracted them.

However, unlike RyuZU, whom Marie had broken down a few times and remembered the blueprint, only Naoto knew of AnchoR's structure.

He attached the 'prosthetics' and repaired the sensors to the bare minimum possible where she could walk–but Naoto practically spent half a month in the cabin doing this job.

No matter how naoto tried to handle it–it seemed AnchoR was still unfamiliar with her limbs, her movements seemingly rigid.

Marie curled her lips, saying,

"–So slow. How long were you going to keep me waiting?"

"You got to be kidding…I can't bring myself to do this emergency measure when it can't even be considered a repair."

–Yes. That was not a repair–it was merely an 'incomplete' procedure.

If it was Naoto of the past, even if he wanted to, there was no way he could accomplish this job.

In the past, even if he could repair it to the 'perfect stage', there was no way he could skillfully adapt to using replacements as a placeholder.

–*To be honest.* Marie thought.

She had no idea as to why those limbs could move after they were connected.

Marie did prepare a theoretically perfect replacement. That was something she

dared to conclude.

However, the important thing was AnchoR herself, for the nano gears to the faux nerves were all contorted and melted due to the high temperature. There was nothing within her that was normal. Furthermore, she took damage from the shots by Gennai, but even without that, it would be extremely difficult to repair her.

However, Naoto himself tried all the methods, and adjusted the contortions.

Marie's vision inadvertently darkened when she found the Main Cylinder on the collarbone to be damaged, but Naoto was able to repair that part beautifully with intricate actions.

Of course, it took a lot of time. Even with Naoto's ears and newly learned technical skills, it took him half a month.

But normally speaking, that was a process that could possibly take years–

No, to be honest, that was a 'is it even possible' thing…?

Furthermore, they were not in a workshop with the latest equipment available.

It was merely done in a 'work zone' that was randomly added to this yacht that was casually swaying on the waves, not even a workshop.

Even Marie had no confidence that she could achieve the same level of results under the same environment and the same time–for now.

However, she quietly decided–that sooner or later, she would catch up.

And so, Marie stood up from the deck chair, ran towards AnchoR who was slowly walking over, and gently led her to walk.

The petite body was dressed in a white Smock Blouse.

Marie pinched the surface of the clothes, and Naoto warned,

"Ah, wait! Just to tell you, don't take off those clothes! The artificial skin–"

"Don't lump me along with you, you pervert–come here, AnchoR. The wind here's very nice. Come rest with mama, okay?"

“Hm, okay…”

AnchoR smiled and nodded, and Marie carried her by the shoulder, leading her towards the deck chair.

…Since half a month back.

Marie’s attitude towards AnchoR was that of being so doting, so lovestruck.

But in contrast–

“Hey–wait, hey! Why are you kidnapping my kid!?’

“Eh?”

Naoto suddenly protested loudly, and Marie gave a condescending look, saying,

“How can I possibly hand AnchoR to a pervert like you? I’ll teach this child on how to become an outstanding lady.”

“What right do you have to call yourself a lady! Leaving AnchoR to you will only create a new landmine of a girl. You got to be kidding me!!”

“Leaving her to you and RyuZU will turn her into a new pervert. Think about it calmly and choose which one you prefer.”

“Thinking about it, one more of you is going to cause damage to the world! Uwaahhh!! But I don’t want a future where AnchoR turns out like that!”

Naoto cupped his head in agony as he said this.

Marie ignored Naoto and she sat down on the deck chair, and had AnchoR on her thighs.

Realizing this, Naoto turned to RyuZU beside him and complained,

“Ryu—-ZU!! Marie just stole my rights as a the parent! What’s with the law!? Why is she the one gaining custody here!!”

RyuZU shot Naoto an icy glare as she responded,

“Pardon my honesty, Master Naoto, but even if the universe does topple over, there is no way Master Marie can be your wife.”

“Woaaahhh!! Right–! My bride is RyuZU! Eh, ah! Then this doesn’t make any sense! On what basis is she claiming custody here!”

“Allow me to repeat myself, master Naoto. Are you unhappy with me about anything?”

“—-No, wait, wait a second, RyuZU. Why does it seem like you’re on Marie’s side?’

Naoto yelled, and RyuZU seemed to ponder for a while, before shaking her head, saying,

“–That certainly is not the case. However, rather than crossing swords with my little sister over my beloved Master, I might as well–I did think of it before, so since this can be settled without that much ruckus, perhaps this scenario might work.

“Eh, that’s a completely different matter!? Why are we talking about different

issues now!? A-AnchoR! Who do you think is better, me or that landmine!?”

While Naoto tossed out this question in his doubt, Marie again asked,

“It’s me right? Isn’t it, AnchoR?”

“—-fueeh…”

AnchoR, stuck between Naoto and Marie, gave a conflicted look.

And Halter, unable to watch on anymore, interrupted,

“Hey, enough already…you two are the worst examples of parents by asking a kid whether she likes papa or mama.”

“”Who’s papa and mama here!?””

Both of them shrieked in unison.

AnchoR kept that look of dilemma on her face as she spoke up hesitantly,

“…I like, papa…”

“Oh yesssh–!”

“Wha–”

Naoto gave a victory poe, and Marie looked dumbfounded.

However–

AnchoR continued on with a carefree smile,

“…But I also like mama, who’s always with papa…”

“”_“”

“Papa’s amazing, and mama’s smiling with amazing papa…AnchoR likes that mama.”

……

After a long silence, Naoto lifted his face adamantly, saying,

“–Right, let’s decide on who’s a better fit with AnchoR.”

"…Heh?"

"The one who can repair both AnchoR and RyuZU completely will have custody. You got a problem!?"

Hearing that, Marie gave a relaxed sneer,

"Didn't you forget, young Naoto? The parts AnchoR use–no, same goes for RyuZU. Both of them have parts beyond normal specifications! Are you able to get materials of equivalent parts without my influence and connections!?"

"Ha! –I'll think of a way to get it. So, tell me what I need to do!"

Fufu Marie snorted gleefully.

"You need a nanoparts branch on the level of the International Technical Research Center. The Breguets have it, and at my house, I have parts for RyuZU–all the spare parts made from the nanoparts…on my word go…I'll–ah!"

Marie's confident look froze for an instant.

"Damn it–I don't have AnchoR's parts! Ugh…in that case, I can only attack my old house's 'factory'…!"

Marie bit her fingernails and growled, and this time, Naoto was giggling away, spiting her,

"Now it's equal opportunity for us! Next destination decided! We're going to attack Marie's house–no, wait. Why do we have to?"

Naoto tilted his head in confusion, and Marie said in a dumbfounded manner,

"Do you think I can go back to my old house and say, 'sorry, I'm an international fugitive now, please let me use my family resources♥', and my house will say 'of course'? You think my dad's an idiot!? It'll be a big hit to the Breguets if he's suspected to be involved with an international terrorist group. I can see me shooting at me once he sees me, you know!? That's why we're going to start attacking them! And while we're at it, let's start a fight with another Enterprise for no reason at all to make it look like it's without bias…ahh, now that it's a rare chance, let's go hit the Vacherons–just to tear them up."

Naoto nodded in agreement. He clenched his fist, giving a thumbs up.

"Alright, that's it. We're doing this! AnchoR, watch papa be a hero out there."

“Please wait and watch mama show off her dignity to this useless bum, AnchoR♪”

“…? …Okay!”

AnchoR did not understand what was going on at all–

But it appeared the duo was delighted, so she nodded and smiled.

Halter slapped his forehead, and told them,

“More importantly, you you two…if we’re going to ride this broken boat to France, at least figure out where we are right now…? If possible, look behind us.”

Hearing that, Marie sighed in annoyance.

She continued to embrace AnchoR on the shoulders, stroking the latter’s hair, and asked Halter,

“What…? Again? They’re annoying…where are the pursuers from this time?”

Half a month passed, and it was the third time they were attacked.

They managed to fight them off, but if this kept up, it was going to get annoying.

While Marie nonchalantly asked, Halter gave a proper answer,

“Who knows…right now, we’re in the Bengal Bay. Myanmar, Malaysia, Bangladesh–where exactly?”

Your choice, Halter’s words were basically implying this, and Marie turned to look behind.

She saw a high speed pursuit boat on the other end, and miniature boat automata headed straight for this cruiser. It appeared that they were faster, and were going to catch up soon.”

“–That’s the Thai coastal police, you know? I was under pursuit before, so I know.”

Vermouth poked his head out from the deck terrace as he responded.

“Goodness…we’re practically in the Indian Ocean, and the Thai coastal guards are mobilized…now this is getting troublesome.”

Halter rubbed his head and groaned, but Naoto did not mind as he asked,

“Is that referring to us? Or political issues?”

“Political–”

Naoto immediately concluded, and activated the the Thermobaric Buster that was originally on the ‘Black Tortoise’–now equipped on the aft of the cruiser.
However–

“Hey, Marie, I thought of something good. Let’s snatch that cruiser.”

He suddenly suggested with a grin, and Halter rubbed his bald head, asking,

“–You intend to cross the Indian Ocean on a military ship? That’s way too obvious. It’s like waving a flag to everyone and saying that we’re here.”

“It’s no different from our actions being caught even though we aren’t waving a flag. Also, we aren’t crossing the Indian Ocean. We’re getting on shore.”

Naoto said that, and Marie considered, while Halter frowned in shock.

Vermouth was the only one smiling away.

“Now this is a good idea. Thailand is a good country, you know–? Gentle, pretty women, and there’s a third gender over there, you know? I think they’ll be really welcoming of ‘Naoko’, won’t they?”

Vermouth gleefully continued with a vulgar joke, and Marie sighed, saying,

“…But this is a good idea. It’s frustrating, but really a good idea, Naoto.”

“Oh? What is it, Milady? Pumped up now?”

“I’m suggesting that we go from Thailand to France on land. Don’t lump me with you, pervert.”

“…Travel on land from Thailand? For what reason?”

Naoto tilted his head as he asked this savage looking Marie, and Marie nodded,

“It’s the Grid Krungthepmahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilokphop Noppharatratchathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit.”

She said in one breath.

Naoto frowned hard, stared at Marie, and asked,

"…Sorry, but what kind of spell is that?"

"That's the official name of the Thai Capital, Grid Bangkok."

She immediately answered, and continued,

"Bangkok–the Multiple Grid in Thailand. There was once a crisis of the functions failing, and the 'Guild' once interfered. Back then, they had an agreement between the 5 Grids, the 4 neighboring countries that were Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Bangladesh…basically, there's a lot of holes in the border and a lot of illegal passages. We can get parts for AnchoR and RyuZU, and we get go North to India."

"–Politics really is incredible…"

"Anyway, that means–"

This time, Marie showed an exceptionally savage sneer as she told Naoto,

"We'll sink all the boat automata, knock out the crew on the pursuit boat, take over, and just enter the Thai military port without issue."

–*She's probably poisoned by Naoto.* Halter thought.

Of course, Halter would not say it out, for he did not know what reaction he would get if he did so.

"Haha! Right now, I'm going to be sure just in case. Are you going to be pirates and capture a pursuit boat? Do you know how many cannons and weapons that thing contains?"

Vermouth screeched, and Naoto too yelled back agitatedly,

"6 of the 15cm machine guns, 18 of the silo missile, 121 people on board, 28 flight automata–should be easy, right?"

"Brilliant! This is really crazy! Let's turn the cruiser around–and attack!"

Vermouth grinned away as he turned the cruiser around.

RyuZU seemed to pay no attention to this commotion, and she seemed to realize something as she said,

“Speaking of which, Master Marie–there is something I have to tell you.”

“–I have a bad feeling about this, but what is it?”

Yes, RyuZU nodded, and said,

“No matter how you try to create a ruckus out this, AnchoR’s Master shall be Master Naoto. She cannot move a certain distance away from him, so do take note.”

RyuZU’s reminder caused Marie’s eyes to widen, her breathing frantic.

She felt dizzy, her disappointment leading to her consciousness fading.

So, what did that mean? If she wanted to continue having AnchoR–

“–I-I have to stay with this pervert on my own will!?”

Marie shrieked in shock,

Halter watched the group yap away, and really felt peeved as he retorted,

“…Have you guys forgotten that we’re all international fugitives wanted by the whole world? No matter whether we like it or not, we need to move together.”

“”How’s such a dumb thing possible!?””

“…You guys are the dumb ones, seriously…”

Naoto and Marie exclaimed in unison, causing Halter to sigh hard.

At this point, now that they had to fight alone against a massive force, he had the increasing feeling that he was foolish for being the only one sweating over this.

And then, he suddenly turned to Vermouth, who was steering the boat, saying,

“–Oh, right, kid. Where do you want to follow us to?”

“What’s with this, bro? Aren’t we on the same boat in having only our heads left? You don’t have to be wary of me like this, right?”

Vermouth snickered.

“Eh, just find me a place and leave me on shore, and I do intend to say goodbye. Before that though, please help me get back my normal body. It’s too cruel to

leave me in such a body and go, right?"

Vermouth referred to the blonde hot smoking body, and Halter nodded,

It's true, halter thought *If I'm in the same situation, I'll like to get out of this sooner.*

"And even when we're on our separate ways, I'll come back to help if there's anything interesting. These brats are coming up with some really interesting things–"

I guess. Halter shrugged, and opened the metallic box beside him by kicking hi.

The box opened with a bam, and there's lots of treasure within it–no, there were all kinds of weapons ranging from rifles and anti-tank cannons.

He grabbed a massive Gear Launcher from within, and carried it on his shoulder.

Naoto suddenly seemed to have thought of something as he said,

"I say, Marie, maybe we should be issuing a warning at this time now, right?"

"You're right. Let me think…I'm not too good in Thai…"

"Oh? So there's a subject the super genius girl isn't good at? That surprised me. In that case, leave it to me."

Vermouth teased, and Marie frowned,

"You know how to speak Thai?'

"I said that it's a 'good country', isn't it? I used to be an Agent, you know? Don't look down on me, Missy."

"…I feel that losing to you is the second most infuriating thing to me in this world. Once we get to Thailand, I'm going to familiarize myself with it."

"Go ahead–so? What do I say?"

"…Let me think. Give up on resistance and hand over that pursuit boat. You'll get court martialed if a cruiser snatches a boat, but relax. Just tell them that the 'Second Upsilon' did it to gain sympathy, okay?"

“Okay, don’t get wet because of my proficiently in foreign languages, okay?”

Vermouth laughed, and took a deep breath.

Then, he yelled at the speaker equipped on the cruiser.

“เห..เห้ย..เรือลาดตระเวนลำที่อยู่ข้างลางนั่น! มันน่าหงุดหงิดที่พวกซิงขับเธออยู่, เนอะ? ฉันจะทำให้เธอคร่างด้วยลีลาส่ายสะโพกของฉันจนเธอต้องร้องขออีก! ถ้าไม่อยากให้พวกนั้นขี่เธอก็ทำให้ห้องควบคุมเปียกซะก่อนซิ! ไอพวกซิงทั้งหลายที่กำลังสั่นอยู่บนนั้น รีบๆกระโดดลงทะเลได้แล้ว!”

“Ah—ah—hey, that patrol boat down there! Kinda pissed to have a virgin riding on you, right? I’ll get you panting with some amazing hip techniques that you’ll be begging for more! Wet your bridge first if you don’t want others riding on you! Those virgins riding on it and cowering, hurry up and jump into the sea!”

–After that, the hail of bullets rained upon the cruiser, indicating the futility of those words.

Marie was knocked down by the explosions and water pillars from up close, askking incredulously,

“…What did you say?”

“I said what I was told to do.”

Vermouth nonchalantly answered.

Halter gave a lethargic sigh, nodding,

“…Yeah. Looks like they felt the sincerity of this kid. There’s no way they can feel anything that doesn’t exist in the first place.”

“Hahahaa! Translating is really difficult, bro!”

Vermouth exclaimed, showing no intention of reflecting upon his actions as he answered.

The bullets glided past the sky, ripping through the oceans. The explosions shook the atmosphere, and the intense waves hit the yacht.

In this emergency, Marie yelled happily,

“Final confirmation! Vermouth in charge of the wheel! Approach them and dodge the bullets at maximum speed! Halter’s in charge of firepower! Sink the boat automata using the Gear Launchers and machine guns!”

Naoto said,

“RyuZU, once we get close enough for you to jump on, knock them all out. AnchoR, watch papa hijack the wheel of the pursuit boat!”

“Understood.”

“…Papa, mama, do your best…!”

RyuZU bowed elegantly, and AnchoR smiled as she cheered on.

…As he watched that exchange.

Halter wondered.

Whether Naoto and Marie actually realized it.

The indisputable fact–that those two were already ‘equal to Gods’ on this planet.

It did not matter whether those two were really humans, it did not matter how they defined themselves.

No matter how they assumed themselves, how would the ordinary people who knew of their power view them–

The public called them Second Upsilon–the Second Coming of ‘Y’, that was what it meant.

It was to be expected that the world would not simply sit back and watch them.

The world could not possibly ignore the ‘Gods’ who existed in reality–who possessed such a tremendous power.

Naoto and Marie had grown.

They practically leapt into the realm of Gods in one step, and surpassed it.

That was what he felt in Kyoto, the dreams he harbored in his youth that became reality.

But on the other hand, the uneasiness he had back then seemed to increase by the day–

For him to have such a feeling, that would indicate–

“I’m getting old now, am I?”

Halter inadvertently blurted out such familiar lines, and sighed,

And then, he spoke to the black clothed automata not too far away, who was following Naoto’s instructions and preparing to end everything with ‘Mute Scream’ at any given moment, saying,

“Hey, Missy. RyuZU.”

“How callous–I suppose I did mention it before, but what is it?”

“Do you think this is the ‘gear of fate’ at work?”

Halter asked.

RyuZU silently answered with an elegant smile,

“I do not have a function that can observe such a thing, however–”

She slowly lifted her stare.

And looking over to where she was looking–it was the ‘Equatorial Spring’ that continued to spin in the distant sky.

RyuZU asked,

“Which direction does that spring appear to be moving towards?”

“…The right.”

“Really? But if you move down South from here, past the equator, and look at that spring again, your answer will be ‘left’.”

…The cruiser continued to shake.

The bullets rained upon them, and any one hit could have reduced the cruiser to

shrapnel. In such a situation however, RyuZU continued to look up at the clear sky, and continued on,

“The truth is something subjective as according to how many observers there are–but there is only one fact. It is spinning right now, and that is the main point, no?”

…The automata discussed a philosophical issue through an observer effect.

Halter could not help but feel skeptical.

But at the same time, *is it convincing because she said it*–he wondered.

The automata that could move in imaginary time, and had negative output.

This fact was that time was simply a matter of truth.

No matter how distorted, or how it spun in reverse…he could not deny that it was spinning…and that was fate.

On the other end of his sight, the duo who had the abilities to change the world were discussing while being fired upon.

“Hey Halter! You need to do something! That’s a lousy body, but man the machine gun at least!”

“We’re running out on the Thermobaric Buster shots, uncle! Get to work!”

“–So that is how it is, Master Scrap Metal. You should be getting to work, no?”

…Goodness.

He gave a wry smile.

“…Well, since it’s the God of fate leading us, I’ll go on until the very end.”

Sayin that, he aimed the Gear Launcher he carried upon his shoulder.

He imagined the day in the past when the world ended–and when it was recreated.

He faced the truth that the day would arrive again.

He laughed that no matter how old he was, he ultimately was a brat no different from the kids in front of him

Halter rubbed his bald head, and slowly squeezed the trigger.

–Tick tock, tick tock.

The gears spun.

Regularly, mechanically, inevitably.

And so, they continued to count time as it existed.

Even as clocks stopped, it meant nothing.

Even when damaged, twisted, the wheel of time would continue to spin.

Regularly, mechanically, inevitably.

–Pointing towards the malfunction, distorted time.

Tick tock, tick tock–

–It merely continued forward towards the direction it should be heard, continually spinning.

As to whom it was headed to, in which direction it should be going towards, even God did not know–

Afterword

On a certain day and month, at a certain place.

The editor-in-charge—correction, the judge S's voice rang.

"The accused, Tsubaki Himana. Step forward."

The prosecutor Kamiya declared the charges,

"The accused had received the proposed plot from Yuu Kamiya, me at the beginning of the year, and left it straggling for 6 months—"

I object! Himana tried to protect himself.

Though 'those protecting him are fools' apparently was a line he heard in foreign dramas, there was none on his side, and he had no reason to deny the 'fool' part. Thus, Himana continued with feistiness,

"Judge! The prosecutor intends to create a bad impression here! I did receive a plot outline at the beginning of the year, but an A4 sized 'memo' can't be called a plot!'

Furthermore—till this point, Himana glared at Kamiya, and rebuked poignantly,

"Since this jury is inquiring the charge for the late submission of the script, I strongly insist Kamiya should be included!"

The accused firmly insisted, but the prosecutor shook his head, sighed, and answered,

"Dear judge, this case, the 3rd volume, was meant to continue on from the 2nd volume's contents, and the completed script was already done when the 2nd volume was being sold. It is apparent that there is sufficient material—"

"I protest! I protest! While the story was to continue from the 2nd volume, there was a major change to fit the ending at the last minute when we divided the volume! It's a lie to say that the original manuscript existed!"

Himana swung his fist onto the witnesses' table to insist, but this time, Kamiya hollered,

“You’re the one who changed the story! You should be the one responsible for the fallacies in the settings!”

“I started free writing because of those words of yours, and that’s why I couldn’t end it. You dare deny it!?”

“Stop being so preposterous here! Can’t you just come up with a setting without any fallacies!?”

“Haah! You hear that, judge!? Kamiya was the one who said at first ‘leave the reconstruction of the story to me’! And then he said ‘we’ll talk later. No **** No Life’s killing me now’…isn’t this a violation of the agreement—!?”

—The court got heated up as both sides insisted back and forth! Phew, where is the sin!? What is justice!?

And while the volley of words rang in this court drama (leaving aside what happened)—!

“—You had enough of this farce?”

““Ah, yes.””

After hearing the voice of the judge, correction, editor-in-charge S, Kamiya and Himana sat in unison.

The so called sin and punishment, good and evil, was summarily deemed as ‘both sides guilty’ when considering the fact that the manuscript was delivered late.

Such a terrible script. But in the extremes of a court drama—

“**This ugly show of pushing responsibilities back and forth** isn’t important. Speaking of which…”

The editor-in-charge S stated the cold truth, took the cover out, and pointed at something,

“Here—why is it not ‘co-written’, but ‘collaborator’?”

—Author: ‘Yuu Kamiya’, *collaborator* ‘Tsubaki Himana’.

“Ah—…erm, you see…this is just a case of different frequencies. It’s common, isn’t it?”

“So what’s with the Oblaat-like encompassing way of words in this ruckus no different from a quarreling band?”

The editor-in-charge S retorted with his eyes half opened, and Kamiya replied, still not daring to look at the editor-in-charge S in the eyes.

“The creativity doesn’t match…I guess it really fits here. We kept emphasizing since the first volume that ‘I’ll correct anything Tsubaki can’t end off with’—and by the time I realized it, the plot, setting, structure, and even the individual lines were written by me, to a point where most of the narratives was written by me, so I really was very shocked. If this is ‘cowriting’, the editor-in-charge name should be placed under it, so—

The two stares met each other as Kamiya and Himana spoke amicably,

“There were still other choices, like Yuu Kamiya with Tsubaki Himana’.

“Yeah, or maybe Kamiya featuring Tsubaki, or maybe Yuu Kamiya~with Tsubaki Himana~.”

“–Hm, well, I do apologize interrupting both of you while you are seriously trying to tell me this, and I’ll not pursue the matter any further since none of you spared any conscience over. Anyway, since it ended up that Mr Kamiya practically finished everything in the end, and this is the common understanding between both of you, can’t we simply exclude Mr Tsubaki’s name from the column?”

“I hope so…**the issue here is that Tsubaki didn’t exactly do nothing at all**.”

Kamiya added on, and continued to show fish eyes as he stared at the icy floor,

“He provided some interesting ideas, and practically wrote all my lines. Once the story gets large and complicated like this though, ending this story somehow became my work in the end, no?”

And Himana too gave a similar look as he looked up to the sky, muttering,

“This is the limitation of collaboration. Since the workload for every volume isn’t going to be 50-50-, we concluded that we can only split the work somehow.”

In conclusion, both of them took turns declaring,

“The reason why there aren’t things done isn’t because nobody thought of doing it, but that they chose not to do it.”

“This isn’t correct at all. There are those who thought of it and tried it, only to find

that it doesn't work. There are two such people here."

Upon seeing the Zen-like look both of them showed, ostensibly enlightened, the editor-in-charge S looked peeved.

He was almost unable to say anything, ostensibly enduring a major migraine as he eked out the words,

"**It's kinda late."**

–Eh, what have you been thinking about us all this time–?

Both of them were literally stunned beyond gasping, but barely managed to swallow their words in response to the editor-in-charge S.

And then, the editor-in-charge sighed with lethargy as he said,

"…Eh, assuming that, Mr Tsubaki's workload should be increased the next time, no?"

"Eh! It'll be normal next time."

"We'll just change it as collaborator: Yuu Kamiya the next time. Is there a problem?"

"…What did we just say about 'dividing the work'?"

The editor-in-charge S pressed his temples, and the duo had a boom behind them as they declared poignantly,

"We'll divide the work…we did say that…but…!"

"We never said that…we decided…on what we first…"

Zaa…zaa…

"Both of you, even this amicable, peaceful me is about to start punching people here♥."

He declared this with a Noh mask-like face, and immediately looked away towards the script in his hands,

"…Well, I'm fine with it as long as you can finish the script. **As for the 4th volume–**"

–At that moment, a gust blew.

The editor-in-charge looked back, and found that the 2 people who were supposed to be there were no longer around.

–They escaped.

And in the face of this fact, the editor-in-charge let out a deep, deep~ sigh,

“…They show such chemistry only when running away; can’t they apply this to writing the script?”

いつかやるぞやるぞと思いつつとうとうやってしまった
衝撃の謎の銀河美少女ナオコちゃん(歓喜

このキャラデザは3巻の内容を聞かされる前に
女装したらどんなかんじかなー?と
サラサラっと描いてしまったものである……が

まさか今巻で本当にしてしまうとは衝撃の事実です(ニヤリ

夢クロプラ
設定資料

クロプラ
設定資料
肆
終焉機
衝撃の大人モード
身長はリューズの少し下くらい
天使のようで悪魔のようなイメージ
戦闘力はラスボスより強い隠しボス(味方)
通称、シンプル・イズ・ヤベェ
開幕強制カンストダメージを叩き出す理不尽の権化(味方)
カワイク最強なイメージでデザインしました(味方)
Another

Clockwork Planet - Volume 03

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